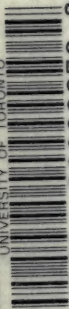


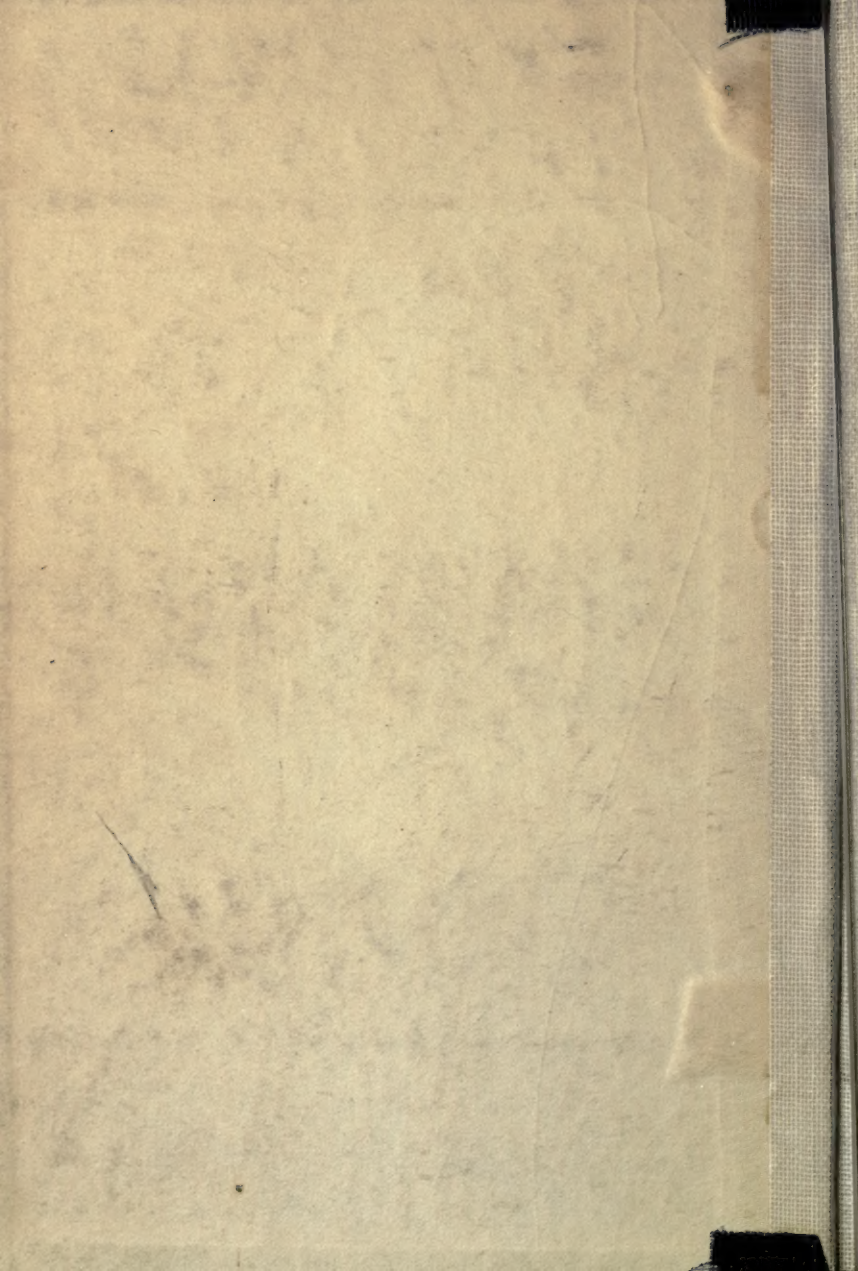
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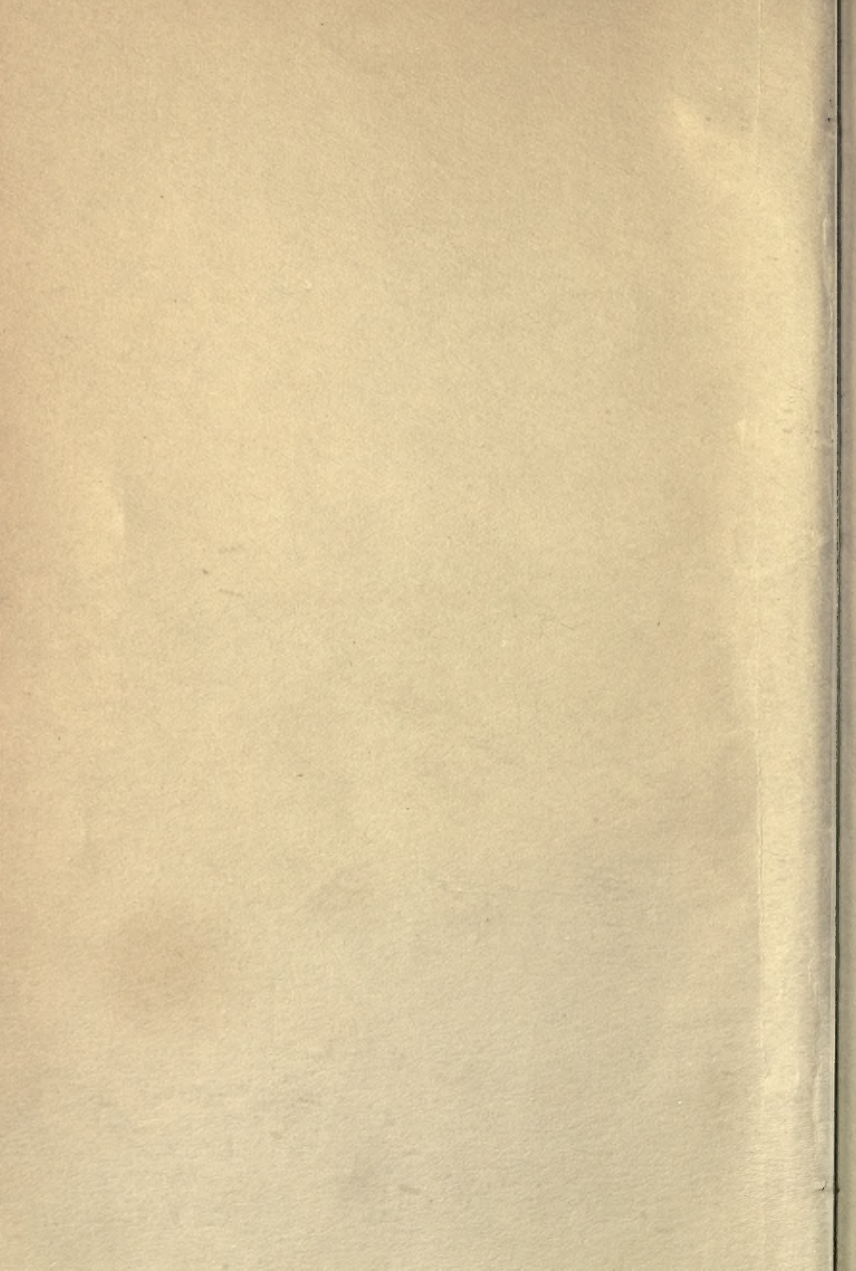
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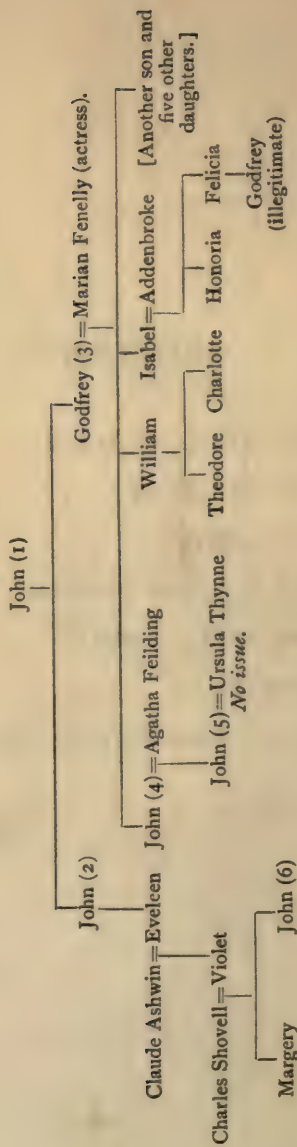
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THE INGESTRE FAMILY



PRELUDE



THE KNIGHT'S MOVE

I

JOHN INGESTRE junior, coming in from the stables by a complicated backway of his own invention—there were plenty to choose from at the Hall—paused at the door of the butler's pantry.

'Anyone in the drawing-room, Markham?' he asked in confidence.

'Mrs. Thynne and Miss Ursula, Mr. John,' said the permanent official he addressed, who was polishing glass.

'Dash Mrs. Thynne,' said Johnny. 'I mean, I knew she was there already. Is there anyone that matters?' He slashed his legs lightly with his whip, to convey an idea to Markham, connected with the mud they liberally displayed. Markham understood correctly that Johnny's betrothed and her mother could (or must) stand him in any garb, but some of the ladies of the district were more fastidious. Being a permanent official, however, it was hard to move Markham from his chosen line.

'Lady Lydia is also with Mrs. Ingestre, sir——'

'Dash Lady Lydia!' said Johnny cheerfully. 'Bert, we shall get some tea, at this rate.' Bert, in Johnny's rear, in even more splashed and unseemly attire, was Lord Dering's heir, an immensely important person everywhere but in Johnny's society.

'Mrs. Clewer called, sir,' said Markham, 'but may have left again unknown to me, since she looked in to see the conservatory.'

'Who's Mrs. Clewer?' said Bert, as John's face lengthened,

'An American,' he said briefly, 'with the native standards. Oh, Lord, Markham, I've got to change, and I'm so tired.' He sat down upon a pantry chair and laid his head on the back of it. The movement was a sudden one, and made Markham's stores of cut glass ring again : the attitude, like all Johnny's attitudes, was emotionally effective. Markham glanced at him, not moved,—that was impossible,—nor protesting,—he was too used to it : tolerant, benignly.

'You go and wash, sir,' he said. 'I'll send some tea up there. Then you can dress and see the ladies afterwards. If Mrs. Clewer goes, she goes ; but if she stays, she stays.'

'You paint Mrs. Clewer to the life,' said Johnny. 'She does everything thoroughly, doesn't she? Oh, Lord, she's so pretty, Bert,—and Ursula can't bear her. She and Ursula are cat and dog. Was she scrapping with Miss Thynne when you last went in, Markham? Because if they're really at it, I'll risk all, and take Dering in to see the fun.'

'When I last went in, sir,' said Markham, 'all the ladies were listening to Dr. Ashwin——'

'To who?'

'Dr. and Miss Ashwin arrived by the four-ten, sir. I understood they were expected.'

'The deuce,' said Johnny, frankly surprised. 'They weren't, here : but I own it doesn't go for much. I suppose Mother knew about it.'

'What's Miss Ashwin?' said the simple Bert. As for doctors anything, Mr. Dering took no stock in them : but a Miss might always be a thing of interest.

Markham waited politely for Johnny to answer ; but as Johnny only hid his head in his arms on the chair, in apparent complete collapse, he replied after an interval.

'Miss Ashwin is a young lady, sir,—what one might call extremely young.'

'She's nobody at all at present,' said Johnny. 'But

her father is rather—otherwise. Her father—er—exists. *We* have heard about him,—and he married Father's female cousin, which brings him into the family.' He had another crisis of tragedy. 'And he's *sure* to need setting down, and Father's not at home to do it. I shall have to buck up, and I don't *want* to. Oh, Lord!—Markham, what was he telling the ladies?' He turned his languid head on his dirty hand, opening his dark eyes full upon the retainer. Johnny came of a stock that could hardly be ugly if they tried, and he was a handsome specimen. The butler, who had been looking at him, desisted sedately.

'So far as I happened to hear, sir,' he said, 'the doctor was talking about a murder case,—a kind of *cause célèbre* somewhere back in history. Charles Second, I heard him say, sir. Something to do with this house, if I am not mistaken.'

'Hullo,' said Johnny, rousing. 'What's he know about it? I say, Markham, was there another man?'

'No, sir, only the ladies.'

Johnny sniffed. 'Come on, Bert,' he said, suddenly galvanised, 'we'll make a mixed audience, you and me. We'll just wash our hands first, for safety. No outsider is going to preach to my relations—I mean, people who will be my relations presently—about my own house. It simply isn't safe for Ursula to listen to it, without me to help. We'll go and—er—create a diversion, shall we?'

'Rather,' said Mr. Dering. So they went.

They created a diversion in the drawing-room. Johnny, it must be admitted, generally did. He had secured attention in the district, not only as a stirring personality, an only son, and the heir to an extensive property in two counties; though these facts lent him interest, naturally. Johnny, so-called since the first generation was John, had had the misfortune to differ with his father, at an early age. That is, he had always differed with his father, more or less; but he had, since his schooldays, three years back—

he was only twenty-two at present—been at violent odds with him, and he had been but lately recaptured by authority, and penned, as it were, into his own. The romance of the prodigal clung to him still ; and since his father—also a stirring personality—was regarded with considerable awe in this, his native county, Johnny had earned in outfacing him not only curiosity, but some respect.

He had begun, at the age of eighteen, by flatly refusing to follow the path of tradition to Oxford, and declaring that he was going on the stage. There should have been nothing particularly surprising in this, since his paternal grandmother had been an actress, and he had the acting bent strongly in the blood ; but the family were surprised. Johnny's father and his grandmother were furious, and all his aunts were shocked. He avoided unpleasantness by not going home, merely pursuing his own way of life in London, with a doggedness and indifference to his own ultimate advantage that disconcerted everybody, his father in secret most of all.

Every means was tried to detach him in vain. He was bullied and bribed, tricked and tempted, his allowance curtailed, his prospects threatened, all to no avail. Johnny liked his new friends, and he did not happen to like his father. The parental methods, for some time past, had bored him. Having always figured as a rebel, he had tried all his father's moods, and admired none of them. He always gave a good account of himself in their engagements, and flamed out himself at times ; but unreasoning and unvarying irascibility annoyed and distracted him, though he did not say so. To betray sensitiveness in such surroundings was useless. He wanted to be quit of them simply, and to try his own life. At a distance of thirty miles or so, he could stand his relations very well, and rather enjoyed, in the intervals of artistic study, the assault levied so tirelessly upon him. After all, if things came to the worst, with the new arts he was learning, he

could always knock his father down : lay him out tidily, that is,—since Mr. Ingestre was rather old and infirm, there was no need to proceed to extremities : though at times he had thoughts of that, when he suspected that his mother at home was suffering among the combatants. As for his grandmother, she was for obvious reasons older still ; but then there was good hope of her coming to a natural end, before she insulted him or his mother past bearing. Johnny, piously minded, commended her to nature's attention, and went on.

The year succeeding that of his majority, his mother fell ill. Three months later, to the surprise of the people whom he had surprised already, Johnny collapsed. He gave in,—went to heel, to use his father's term,—and that in such a pleasant and unexpected manner, that his irate relations, cut off in full tide, were left feeling rather foolish, as though wondering what there had been to excite themselves about, in such a nice young man. He even managed to convey to some of them that the whole three-years' escapade had been a device to 'have them on,'—only, not his own parents. They knew him, in their several ways, too well. The exact nature of the drama on the hearth was never made public ; the world merely saw the results. Johnny's mother looked the wreck of what she had been ; Mr. Ingestre, in conquering his turbulent heir, seemed to have crossed a stage of life, and was quieter, if no less superb, in his tyranny. Johnny remained himself outwardly, cheerful and undismayed, and turned his attention to sporting abroad, and flirting at home, in the approved fashion, with marked success in both departments. He also engaged himself, with the paternal blessing, to an eligible young woman with the proper antecedents, with whom he was in love, and who was generally understood to be devoted to him. Not that this went for much, for plenty of young ladies were devoted to Johnny. But it completed the picture of domestic felicity on the Ingestre hearth appropriately ; and made the prodigal's future

prospects—to quote his own expression when congratulated—‘very jolly indeed.’

There was a little crowd of people in the drawing-room, friends, family, and the indifferent. Johnny, thanks to Markham, had been enabled to class them in advance. Family, in addition to his mother and the usual fringe of aunts, were Miss Thynne, so soon to bear the name that she counted as kin, and Mrs. Thynne, into the terms of whose proximate relationship John did not pry too closely. Friends represented were Lady Lydia aged fifty, attached to his mother, and Mrs. Clewer aged twenty-five, attached to himself. Among these interesting and necessary people, Dr. Ashwin held a post on the outskirts, on trial as it were, to be accepted as family if he so behaved. Dr. Ashwin’s little girl with her hair tied back in a large bow was the indifferent,—Bert, who had young sisters, could see to her.

Johnny, having arranged all this in his mind as he crossed the hall, greeted the company as befitted their style and standing, not to say his own as temporary host. He was fortunately supreme, in the present conditions. His mother’s strictures upon his appearance he accepted with philosophy,—a mere form, since she could not really be sorry to see him. He and Bert had obviously come to help her, in defiance of all their natural instincts to go upstairs and wash.

He helped with Mrs. Clewer first.

‘Dr. Ashwin’s been curdling us in the lov-liest way,’ she told him. ‘And he requires us to believe nothing at all, which is the lov-liest part. I never forget things I’m *not* required to believe,—do you?’

‘Never,’ said Johnny fervently. ‘And vice versa. It was always getting into my school reports.’

‘Where were you educated?’ said Mrs. Clewer agreeably. ‘Eton? Oh, perhaps I ought to know.’

‘Not at all,’ said Johnny, his face a blank. ‘It could

hardly be expected of you. A native would know on sight.'

'Even in that cos-toom,' said Mrs. Clewer. 'Well, now, yes, I might have guessed it. The way you wear your mud is so becoming,—and the way you are at present transferring it to Miss Ashwin's shoes.'

Johnny, who was lying full length in his low chair, moved his feet about a hundredth of an inch. 'Dering,' he announced, 'is the only other object-lesson present, but it's too dark for you to study him. He had a governess—I mean a tutor—but he went on afterwards to Oxford. Now, I did not.'

'Is that so?' said Mrs. Clewer, who knew all about him. 'Then let's see. You are Eton, but not Oxford; and Mr. Dering is Oxford, but not Eton; and Dr. Ashwin is presoomably the purr-fect product of both.'

'Oh, Lord, no,—' Johnny, lowering his tone a trifle, was proceeding to explain, when the indifferent child, a yard from his right elbow, said distinctly and softly,—'Yes.'

Johnny turned his handsome head. He looked at her a moment as a very large dog regards a very small cat. Then he turned back to Mrs. Clewer, and resumed his conversation.

'I don't see,' said Mrs. Clewer, when he took her out to the hall at her departure, some minutes later, 'why you want to treat that little girl like that. That is not my idea of the perfect Etonian, anyhow. She'll be pretty one day.'

'Will she?' said Johnny. He culled a few more opinions,—Mrs. Clewer's were always worth having,—delivered in a gay inexpressive tone. Dr. Ashwin, as he expected, was a very intelligent man. He came up to what Mrs. Clewer had heard of him,—of course she had heard. Mr. Dering, she presumed, represented a class——

'Oh, give him a chance,' said Johnny.

Then he heard about the merits of Ursula, his fiancée, her soo-periority of tone, her accomplishments, and her

style. As Miss Thynne and Mrs. Clewer had been cat and dog at a recent lunch-party, this amused Johnny : but he answered sedately enough. One of the many things he liked about Mrs. Clewer were her American manners. They were a little more ornamental than the English ones, and he had a taste for such ornament. Besides, it was a fact that Ursula had style, though it was a very different style from Mrs. Clewer's.

He showed her out via the conservatory, which took time, so great was her enthusiasm over the flowers. Johnny explained at length how he would have liked to present his guest with certain chrysanthemums to match her dress : but how his head would be taken off, first by his father, and then by the gardener, if he did.

'But this is your mother's hot-house, surely,' said Mrs. Clewer.

'So-called,' said Johnny. 'The general effect is hers. If she picked a flower, her head would come off with just the same ease as mine.'

'Or King Charles', mused Mrs. Clewer. 'Wonderful, the etiquette persisting in your first families. Don't you just lov to get back to it all, say now !' She faced him mischievously.

Johnny did not answer for a moment, since he did not wish to tell the truth. His eyes roved. Then he said— 'It's very nice to listen to Ursula's music in the evenings.'

'Don't you sing to her ?' said Mrs. Clewer.

'Oh dear no. I sing to Mother sometimes.'

'Her mother ?'

'Oh, *Lord*, no, Mrs. Clewer. Mine.' He waited, and then asked, 'I say, how do you think my mother's looking ?'

'Better than she did last year,' said Mrs. Clewer after consideration. 'I incurred your father's displeasure last year, by inviting her to go back with me for a short stay of six months or so. My, your father was vexed with me in June. I said I found a good yearly holiday from family care paid to purr-fection in my own case, and Mrs. Ingestre

might find the same. I thought to myself that your father and you could investigate your differences while she was gone, and generally speaking settle up.'

'It was beastly kind of you,' said Johnny fervently.

'But I'd have lov-d to have had her,' explained Mrs. Clewer. 'So would Sydney and the girls. We'd have had a beautiful time, all together in the Adirondacks. But there,—your notions are so different! And now your mother has got you, anyway. And so's Miss Thynne.'

The last sentence was in a slightly different tone, since Mrs. Clewer clearly thought she had been serious long enough. She and Johnny 'ragged,' in a regrettable manner, in the hall to which the conservatory gave exit, and Markham, aware that Mr. John was an engaged young man, pretended not to see them.

His help was no longer needed, on returning to the drawing-room. Dr. Ashwin was talking historical scandal again, to Lady Lydia this time, so Johnny sat down next to Ursula, within range, so as to check him if necessary. He had not yet tried to check Dr. Ashwin, but he was certain it could be done. Ursula looked handsome as usual, fair and pleasant in the firelight, but rather serious. She was in need of attention, probably.

Johnny attended to her, discreetly. She did not like him to over-do it in public, but then publicity is tempered when the twilight is falling. He established communications with Ursula in Dr. Ashwin's despite. Then he edged his chair a little nearer to her, glancing at the child the while. Almost in the same instant, the child turned away, inclining her head to her father's shoulder, and curling her little hand inside his arm. This was really quite well-chosen behaviour, for what is generally the inquisitive age, and Johnny's educational instinct approved of it. Also the attitude and its suggestion were singularly pretty, and while he talked nonsense to Ursula, he cast her occasional glances. He wondered if she were badly bored, since she

must know all her father's smart anecdotes already. Nobody had spoken to her at present, so far as he had seen, and she was not being encouraged at head-quarters, —the man ignored her. Johnny caught his mother's eyes upon him at one point, and probably shot his thought to her. Anyhow, Mrs. Ingestre proposed shortly afterwards that Violet should be taken to her room. As she suggested it, her eyes rested upon her prospective daughter-in-law. She was all but an invalid herself.

'Get on, Ursula,' Johnny whispered. 'Your move.'

'It's yours,' murmured Ursula, half smiling.

'Rot! How can I take a young lady to her room? When I'm engaged too,—awful.'

'She's only a kid,' said Ursula. 'Go on,—your mother's looking.'

'I'm jolly shy,' said Johnny. 'It's jolly caddish of you, throwing it on me. You'll have to do it, one of these days.'

'Sufficient for the day,' said Ursula. 'I don't look forward.'

'Oh, I say,—don't you?' murmured Johnny.

'You ought to have changed,' said Ursula reproachfully, laying a hand on his mud-splashed knee. 'I saw Mrs. Clewer thinking so.'

'You'll have to reform me,' said Johnny, laying his hand on hers. 'I like reforming. I do it suddenly every now and then, and startle people——'

'Don't ring, Agatha,'—the doctor's keen tone cut through his. 'Tell her just how many turns, and she can find it for herself.'

'Can she? I like that!' Stirred by the tone of authority as by a war-cry, Johnny arose. 'Which room did you say, Mother? Right-o. Come along.'

Mrs. Ingestre, her tired face clearing slightly, turned back to her other duties. Ursula was rather vexed, partly because John had abandoned her, partly because she knew in her heart it was her office, and not his.

Johnny did not tell Miss Ashwin the hour of dinner, because he could not remember what time children of that age went to bed. Nor was it really a question of remembering, since he had hardly hitherto come in contact with little girls. He was quite at sea about her, and could not even guess her age. It was far too much trouble to reckon it, naturally; so he asked her father, when he showed him to his room in turn.

'Just fourteen,' said Dr. Ashwin. 'I hope she will not be in your mother's way. I have warned her. It is extremely good of Agatha, in the circumstances, to take us.'

Johnny wondered which circumstances,—his father's absence, his own courtship, or the more intimate anxiety concerning his mother's state. After a minute, since it was a doctor—and an Etonian—he asked. Then he found it was as he suspected, and this very acute person had swept up every detail connected with his mother's ill-health, which had verged on, and just missed, becoming a serious illness. Dr. Ashwin had been watching her in the drawing-room, it appeared, inclined to think she did too much, and asked if she had anyone to help her.

'Not since the nurse left,' said Johnny. 'She's got a frightfully all-round maid, who puts us all in our places, Father included.'

'That's something,' the doctor admitted. 'You've not got a sister,—no.'

'No,' said Johnny. 'My wife, when she's my wife, will help her probably.'

Dr. Ashwin laughed, very pleasantly. 'Better not count on that,' he said. 'When are you to be married, John?'

Johnny found himself answering questions after that, as one answers a superior, not an equal even. He even caught himself up once, on the verge of saying 'sir.' Now, Johnny had always tried not to call his schoolmasters 'sir,' and owing to his agreeable manner, had generally succeeded. He resented it of course, in Dr. Ashwin's case, nor could he account for the impulse afterwards: for the doctor was

neither large, like his own father, nor old, nor powerful, nor even particularly brilliant, at least in familiar talk. At dinner he became what Johnny called 'otherwise,' and held the company.

Johnny, sitting in his father's chair, 'bucked up' to match him, in vain. He was outmatched, at his own dining-table,—for about the first time in his life he wanted his father. His father might, just conceivably, have kept this stranger in his place. Yet he was amused, and that, in life, is something; and he saw his mother laugh, which was still more. She laughed—really laughed—so seldom nowadays: Johnny could forgive much when he saw it, down the table's length.

However, later on, in the drawing-room, he complained to Ursula. He found a nice quiet corner, complained at length, and asked to be consoled. He had been sat upon, he said, and in Bert's presence: not once only, but several times.

'How good for you,' said Ursula. 'I wish I had heard.'

'I'm glad you didn't,' said Johnny. 'Our subjects were totally unsuitable. Anyhow they would have been above your head. . . . Ursula.'

'Well?' said Ursula, who was sewing something.

'Ashwin was talking about the stage.'

'Well,' said Ursula, 'you ought to have been able to hold your own there.'

'That's just it. I know about the stage. He doesn't,—he can't possibly,—but he talked me down. Sickening—cheek!'

'I'm glad if you weren't rude to him,' said Ursula. 'You are so often when you think you know.'

'I was rude,' said Johnny indignantly. 'But it made no difference. He's been everywhere, seen all the stages. He knows back history, before I was born, and remembers dates. *Dates!* He was beastly amusing by the way,—oh, he was damned amusing—'

'John!' A pleasant interval.

'I say, do you think he bullies that kid behind-scenes?' said Johnny presently.

'Why should he?' said Ursula. 'No one does nowadays.'

'Dunno. She's so watchful,—watching him all the time. Hadn't you noticed it?'

'She's shy, probably.' Ursula cast a glance in Violet's direction. Johnny was already looking that way, his head close to her shoulder, his dark eyes steadily fixed. He was interested, she could not think why. The child was shy and silent, and gave them, as though forewarned, a very wide berth. 'It's a big house,' Ursula pursued, 'and her first visit. I should think that's enough.'

'She thinks she's not wanted,' remarked Johnny.

Ursula did not reply to that. Presently, as he lay silent, she said—'She's sitting all alone. I suppose I ought to go and talk to her.'

'Er—don't,' said Johnny.

'But I ought. She's your mother's guest,—and yours.'

'Yes. That make you feel responsible?'

He gave her a very nice glance, and she blushed. Occasionally, he shook her composure like that, not often. Ursula had been very well brought up. He was 'nice,' John,—good-looking and well-behaved. She understood from his aunts that he had not always been well-behaved, but he was just now. He had gratified the family. He was a tremendous *parti*,—really tremendous, for Ursula's pretensions; but she had never, even in her letters to her dearest friends, betrayed the slightest exultation. She spoke of 'John' to people very quietly, much as she did of her brothers; and when she could, she held her mother in.

'All right,' he said, after a little more nonsense. 'Call the kid here.'

'I don't know what to call her,' said Ursula. 'You can't call an object of that age Miss.'

'Course you can't,' said Johnny. 'She'll be your

cousin soon. Psst!’ He whistled softly. ‘What’s-your-name,—Violet,—come along here. Miss Thynne has got something to say to you.’ Violet glanced once at her father, then came. ‘Sit down there,’ said Johnny, pointing to a stool. She did so, clasping her knees. ‘Now then, answer nicely. Miss Thynne is going to show us all the way to do it.’

‘What time,’ said Ursula quietly, ‘do you go to bed?’

‘Oh, I say,’ protested Johnny. ‘I should never have started like that. I should have led up to it, easy.’

‘Almost at once,’ said Violet. ‘Now, really, if that clock is right. That was what I was considering, whether to say good-night.’

‘It’s generally done in good circles,’ said Johnny. ‘Why were you considering it?’

‘Because of something Father said. He might—want me.’

‘For a date?’ asked Johnny. ‘I say, were any of his dates wrong, at dinner?’

‘How should she know?’ said Ursula.

‘I hoped she just might,—not had time to forget them. You learn lots of dates, don’t you? When you were her age, Ursula, you probably knew heaps of things.’

‘Do you mean I’m ignorant now?’

‘Yes, thank Heaven.’

‘Do you like ignorance?’ said Violet.

‘Rather,’ said Johnny. ‘Except, of course, in the people I pay to know. People like secretaries, and solicitors, and doctors—’

‘Don’t attend to him,’ said Ursula kindly.

‘I pay Miss Thynne,’ said Johnny, ‘or rather, I shall pay her, shortly, to know nothing—’

‘John, how horrid you are!’ said Ursula, really indignant. ‘Pay me indeed! A nice time you’d have if I didn’t know a great deal more than you do!’

She had flushed, and seemed really offended. Johnny was amused.

'Go it,' he said. 'Back her up,' he directed Violet. Violet smiled absently. Her eyes were, as usual, on her father, who had glanced at the clock.

'There!' said Johnny. 'Bed-time. Go along, kiddy.'

'Are we to have no music?' said his mother's voice. 'Ursula!'

'John has just been informing me he pays me to know nothing,' said Ursula. 'So I certainly shan't amuse him by playing. He must do it.'

'My dear!' said her own mother, distressed. She never understood humour, even Ursula's. 'John was joking,' she added in the pause.

'Rather,' said Johnny. 'I didn't mean that.'

But Ursula persisted, though pleasantly, in refusing. She was easy as she was determined, quite. She replied to the pressure put upon her lightly, since it struck her, not for the first time, that the pressure was light as well. The Ingestres were courteous, but she barely reached their standard. They were a musicianly family. Ursula was quick in such situations, and her mother was instructed not to boast of her attainments—in any direction—for security. John's mother's next remark decided her she had been wise.

'Claude, doesn't Violet play? Make her play just one thing to us before she goes.'

The wordless exchange between father and daughter made it clear that it was that command she had been awaiting, while she sat at Johnny's feet. She looked anxious distinctly, but not startled,—she had been warned well in advance. At least her so-called authority was not the kind who startled and exasperated of fixed intent, as Johnny's did. He had been making comparisons, of course, from the moment when he had begun watching her. The results were much the same,—but the method was different.

'Do you mind not standing just behind?' the child said to him quick and low, after her first item. 'It makes

me so nervous.' He had opened the instrument for her, and remained without a thought to watch, because he was curious. He nodded at the request, and strolled back to Ursula.

'Good,' he informed her in confidence. Ursula did not reply, sewing steadily. During the next item, which was more taxing, needing some intellectual grasp as well as mechanism, he lay beside her listening,—really listening, as Ursula could see by his eyes. She had often doubted, for all his airs and graces, if he really listened to her.

'That's beastly good,' he said softly at the end. 'Beastly good, that is. Mother! *Mother!* Make it play some more.'

'Oh yes, you will,' he said quickly, two minutes later, thinking her father was inclined to worry her unduly. 'You jolly well will, all on your own, because nobody's going to hurt you if you don't. Besides, Father will be there to listen to-morrow, and we're none of us absolutely in it for awfulness, compared to him.'

These singular arguments succeeded, or else the tone did in which they were spoken, when the arguments of mere authority would have failed. Or so Johnny flattered himself,—he may have been wrong. At least Violet played to him, and played what she wanted, 'on her own.'

'He loves it so,' his mother explained to her guest, who was smiling, 'and he has had to forgo it a good deal.'

'Chasing another art,' suggested Claude Ashwin, also aside. 'What about his acting, Agatha? Has Ingestre cut it off? Finally?'

'Finally,' she assented, but gave no explanation, and he did not press her. After a few minutes she added, as though she had considered the addition, consulted with herself,—'We offered him a compromise, but he scouted it.'

'Pish,—yes, so he would.'

'You sympathise?' asked Agatha.

'If you will excuse me. I have no facts.' He glanced at her, in his medical manner, and changed the issue, with

diplomatic ease. 'He's got a voice in him, anyhow,' he suggested, looking towards the subject of their discussion, as he leant carelessly on the piano. 'Surely you sing still, John,—or has that got submerged as well?'

'He never does,' said Ursula from her corner: the only result of which was, to turn the doctor's active attention upon herself.

'Not if you accompany? Oh, but let me assure you, you will find no man satirise wifely knowledge which takes that form.'

'Accompaniment?' asked Agatha.

'Supporting, embellishing,—er—titivating——'

'Concealing deficiencies,' called Johnny. 'Come on, Ursula, if I've got to. May as well get it done.'

'Miss Ashwin will play for you,' said Ursula. 'I will attend, since that's to be my province henceforward.' She matched her colour, and took a new needleful of silk with care.

'Oh, Lord,' said Johnny,—murmured rather. Only Violet heard. She rose, shrinking back from the instrument.

'I expect I must go to bed,' she said. She was a little flushed with her nervous effort past, and her eyes were seeking safety anywhere, probably in flight.

'No,' said Johnny. She found suddenly that he loomed right above her, and that she had retreated into his arms. 'You don't go to bed,' he said, gently shoving her back upon the seat again. 'No time,—sit there. You're wanted. You've got to read something jolly difficult at sight,—d'you mind?' She looked up at him anxious, slightly pleading: then, meeting his eyes, hers changed. Something more than the grace of humour united them, a subtle strand of the kinship, possibly: or something more broadly human still.

'Not really dreadful,' she said contentedly, ceasing to resist. 'And, please, don't watch.'

'I'm going right out there,' said Johnny, pointing.

'Ever so far away. This here's my show piece, or used to be. If you make a muddle of it——'

'I won't,—I won't spoil t, I promise! If I stop or anything, just go on.'

'Right,' said Johnny: and he went his way.

He thought no more at all about her, as was evident. He could not, for the time being, afford it, since he had to make his mark. Johnny, like all good artists, was a fighter, and for the first time since he came back to private life, he had an audience worth the effort of assault. There was an element of sheer fun, too, in knocking over a man like that on his father's hearth, and his spirits, low of late, were improved by his father's absence. He rather thought he could do it, if he tried. Not that his 'show piece' was funny,—far from it,—it was calculated to disturb the fringe of aunts. But he chose it in caution, since he was well outside it, owing to ancient practice: and further, he had reason to hope the aunts had gone to bed.

So he spoke to them once, in all his glory,—gave them a taste of it, such as they were. He had the look, in his arrogant young splendour, of lifting the robe. He may have meant to don it cynically, disdainfully,—the critic thought,—but he lost himself on the way. His inherited presence was splendid, simply,—so dowered he held the eye. Music it was not, strictly regarded, he merely saluted, from his own temple, the other art. His voice, not a large one, was attractive extremely, a pretty gift in itself had he cared to use it in music's cause. But he cared for nothing to-night but to get his effects home on all and sundry, and that he did, sufficiently. Even his mother, who knew his powers best, was surprised. Ursula's mother, who did not know them, was horror-struck. Ursula herself was slightly uncomfortable, and more than a little vexed.

Why had she not known?—it was all she asked! She hated to be taken by surprise. If John could do things like that, it was certainly her right to be warned, to be given the inner place. He had no business to take her

aback with them in front of strangers, as though she were audience herself, not intimate. The feeling of grievance was very strong, and perfectly defensible. Not but what it was good, probably, granted the family,—John was clever, that she had always known. But even of its worth, she was not quite certain, till Dr. Ashwin spoke.

When Dr. Ashwin spoke, it was to praise, with a vigorous simplicity, that overturned all Johnny's ideas about him again. He also took hold of the little girl, by her arms below the elbows, and made her admire him, as to which matter there was not the least necessity. Johnny could get himself looked up to by little females without his assistance, and get himself liked as well, if he happened so to desire. However, he was civil to them, quietly civil, since he had 'done the trick.'

'Were you frightened?' he demanded, as the child leant back against her father, seemingly most content with the constraint of his hands.

'Horribly,' she laughed, 'of playing wrongly. Not of you.'

'You would have been, if you'd looked at me. Oh yes, you would. If that scene's done properly, women faint in all directions,—so I'm told.'

'Then I'm afraid——' She slipped a mischievous glance about the room. John's eyes followed hers. The women present seemed comfortable, certainly. Aunts had evaporated. Ursula's head, and her mother's, were imperturbably bent above their needlework. His own mother, her hand through his arm, was pale and tranquil, looking really happy for the first time that day.

'I'm afraid not,' he agreed. 'Never mind. Some time, you and me'll have a go at them again.'

After that, he took the doctor away to the billiard-room. Ursula was cool when he offered good night, but he did not lay too much stress on it. She would come round of her own accord: or he could fetch her, the next morning.

II

Dr. Ashwin left the next day, but he had been interested in the Ingestre household during the short period he spent beneath their roof,—one night. Johnny interested him,—Ursula still more so. The boy, to his eye, hardly looked happy: the girl had a quite remarkable air of settled sufficiency to all circumstances, good or ill. Yet he thought, of the two, Ursula was the more deluded.

Not at all intentionally on John's part. He was being straight with her, perfectly, so far as his nature permitted. But he was suffering himself from shock. So the doctor calmly diagnosed it, having been allowed, once or twice across the billiard-table, that night, to see his eyes. He had been cut off, brought up in full tide, really baffled; the doctor did not care to see such a look on a young face. Beyond that, he had been tricked through his affections, an evil thing, and dangerous. His devotion to his mother was undoubted, and he had let her sacrifice him to his father's iron will.

That was the plain fact,—a quicker sense than Ursula's would have grasped it, reckoned with it too. But she did not, the least. In the genial calm of this great household which greeted her betrothal, she did not recognise a mere ceremonious shelving of a habitual difficulty, the lull after long storm. Herself on the little pedestal of her triumph, she only saw the Ingestres, for long an abstraction, unlocking all their doors to her, and the heir of all their honours at her feet. John's own apathy, thinly disguised by the lover's futilities, she misread likewise; it suited her,—she had evidently not guessed how far from apathetic his nature was. He idled well, fooled with her agreeably, occasionally he went further, and was 'nice.' He was not 'sentimental,' to use her term, and she was glad of it. She did not miss anything in his manner, because she did not really desire the missing thing. His sort,—she classed

him with his father,—were not sentimental, and it was better so. Their dignity and hers would have suffered by the exchange.

Of his real state of mind she saw nothing,—the recurrent rage of mortification for his broken career. Nor did his mother see all of it. The Ingestre men did not betray themselves before their women, habitually, and Johnny did not exhibit his defeat, any more than his father exploited his triumph, in their society. Least of all did Ursula guess that she herself was one of the spoils of victory, though the steady sun of favour that blessed her from headquarters might have hinted it to her intelligence. Mr. Ingestre had, in making a clean sweep of his son's ambitions, scored the daughter-in-law of his desire by the way. It was a neat stroke of policy, showing great penetration of his puppets, and knowledge of the game. Johnny made no objection : he got on with girls easily, and this was the girl for him. Marriage was the readiest release from his father's chafing rule, it would give him a free hand, and a kingdom of his own,—there was no harm in it. Only he was flinching now, on the verge of the last surrender, shying at moments from a prospect his clear mind would not let him shirk. He was not going under easy, to take a term from the operating-theatre. He was not the kind of boy to do so, when it came to the point. It was a case of clear mismanagement.

All this Dr. Ashwin was enabled to divine during a short and extremely erratic conversation across the billiard-table after midnight : a conversation devoted to art, and consisting largely, on Johnny's side, of objurgation. He was too bold and too young, of course, to confess to flinching. He swore at the billiard-balls,—and he had full reason to do so,—but Dr. Ashwin imagined some of his restless wrath originated from another cause.

However, the penetrating doctor left the next day,—not at all to Johnny's regret,—he did not care for him. He was the kind of man who knew too much, and thought

he knew everything. The seemingly simple questions he asked, combined with the fearful problems he set at billiards, needed a real intellectual effort to deal with adequately. They had spoiled his sleep. The child was preferable, and she,—as it appeared when he reached the breakfast-table, very late,—was to be left behind.

It also appeared that she did not want to be,—she was shy at being left in Johnny's house, under his rule, and had been crying about it,—bullied beyond a doubt. All kinds of things had been happening during his enforced absence on the upper floor. Johnny sat down opposite Violet, relieved Bert of his responsibilities concerning her, and proceeded to look into it, at his leisure.

Further up the table, the ladies of the house were discussing the dance.

The dance was Ursula's dance, given in her honour, so by rights, of course, she should not have been concerned in its arrangement. Only when it came to the point, she had to be. Ursula was the eldest of a large family, and her consequent passion for management triumphed, not only over John's easy opportunism, but over her own sense of the fitting, which was keen. She did not want to presume before her time. She only did want to prove her power, now and again, and test her influence,—measure it with that of John's mother, as it grew.

Ursula, prepared in advance to find John's father formidable, found his mother much more so, privately. She was used to men, and dominant men, in her own home surroundings: it had been part of her training to humour them, and she knew their ways. Also, Mr. Ingestre unbent to her beautifully, she was certain she would have no trouble with him. Mrs. Ingestre was different; she addressed Ursula with consideration, while she looked at her with equable discerning eyes, sunken a little since her illness, as though she sought in the girl's handsome fair exterior more than the eye could see. A persistent slight

suspicion of such behaviour led Ursula to behave towards 'Mother,' as she called her, with peculiar care.

The difficulty with Ursula's dance was the usual one in country places, a lack of men. Both Agatha and her son were engaged in luring his friends from their haunts in town to come down for the night in question,—next but two. The post that morning had brought in the usual number of refusals, or rather adroit excuses, from bachelors in the metropolis, while several large families of girls accepted eagerly.

'Twenty-eight to thirty-seven,' said Ursula seriously, scoring her neat list. 'I'm afraid there's no doubt of it, Mother. No'—to her own parent—'you needn't go through that again. It's right as I've marked it,—nine short.'

'Nine short,' mourned Mrs. Thynne for her hostess. 'That's bad, isn't it?'

'We're lop-sided, no hope for us,' said Mrs. Ingestre, with her air, that annoyed Mrs. Thynne, of being superior to all such minor disturbances. For it was clear no hostess could really be superior to the fact of being nine men short, for a dance. The pretence was absurd.

Striving to be serviceable, Mrs. Thynne scoured her capacious mind for young men, and mentioned such as occurred to her, but to little avail. Ursula seemed suddenly to have grown fastidious.

'If John really gave his mind to it for five minutes——' she observed.

Johnny, who was now leaning on his elbows amid the wreckage of his breakfast, conversing privately with Bert and the Ashwin child, barely looked round. 'I have,' he contended, 'weeks ago. My mind—er—blossomed into Bert, and Billy, and Buckley, and James, and a man James knows at Magdalen. I wrote their names down for Mother, and Mother corrected the spelling from the Peerage and invited them all. They're all coming. So am I.' He relapsed into his confidences.

'Five!' said Ursula.

'I'm a host in myself,' said Johnny. 'As for Bert, he's a Colossus. Do I mean that? Who was the fellow who had a hundred arms?'

He appealed to Violet, who knew. Bert and Johnny instantly fell on her for knowing, so she regretted it.

'You must know more men than that,' said Ursula to John's back.

But on the contrary: Johnny knew very few men,—respectable men. That was Ursula's look-out. He had helped Mother lots about the girls,—weeding them. Hadn't he, Mother?

'Well, you'd better weed a few more, if you must use such horrid expressions.' Speaking with the same competent calm, Miss Thynne's eyes passed over Violet. They simply swept her once: but Ursula's glances were to the point, like her remarks. Her useful mother, attentive to all her expressions, caught the hint.

As soon as Violet, silenced if not defeated, had left the table in her father's wake, Mrs. Thynne took up the theme.

'I suppose the little girl expects to dance,' she said.

'Well,' said Mrs. Ingestre, surprised. 'It would be a little hard to leave her out.'

'Of course she expects,' said Ursula over the list. 'Didn't you notice how carefully she dodged the subject with her father?'

'Meaning he'd object?' said Johnny. He had leant back at last, and turned to them.

'Well, he seemed pretty anxious for her not to be tired, didn't he, when he talked of driving her to the town.'

'Oh, I dare say we could get him to put his foot down, if that's all. He's the kind does it easy, in a stamp. 'Course kids are in the way,' proceeded Johnny, drawling agreeably. 'Like me to try?'

His eyes passed Ursula, and lighted on his mother. He

and she were in complete agreement, and he let her know the pleasant fact. The issue was simple, fortunately. Violet was their relation,—Ursula was not, at present. There was no question, to Johnny's unbiassed mind, as to the ill-manners of the intervention.

'Oh, look here,—rot!' Mr. Dering's little bleat was heard. 'I say, Mrs. Ingestre, you know—— I'll choke off a few of my sisters, sooner than that.'

'Bert's engaged to the kid,' said Johnny to everybody. 'So am I.'

'We shall not trouble you, Bert,' said Mrs. Ingestre, smiling as she rose. 'We want all your sisters, and Billy. Thank you, dear——' she accepted the paper from Ursula. 'I will go and consider Johnny's list of last resources, and he can try some telegrams on the waverers. Will you, Johnny?'

'Rather!' said that gentleman, pleased. Telegrams to the waverers was just his line,—how well his mother knew him! He ran his hand through her arm as she passed him, and drew her out with him on to the terrace.

'Is there anything in it?' was his first enquiry when he got her alone.

'Nothing,' she said. 'Claude leaves all decision for Violet in my hands, naturally. I shall send her to bed at twelve, if necessary.' She added—'Will that do?'

'Rippingly,' said her son. 'That'll settle Ursula's—er—maternal scruples. And it'll knock out Bert.'

'I hope you will all be sensible with the child,' said Mrs. Ingestre, who was wise enough to know the dangers.

'Oh, Mother, ducky!—if you can't go steady at that age! Naturally, we leave it to her.'

'Bert has little sisters,' was his mother's reply to this impertinence.

'If you think that gives him the pull of me,' said Johnny, 'you're wrong: she likes me best.'

'She thinks you are very nice. She told her father so.'

Johnny observed the landscape with lifted brows. 'You see,' he resumed after a pause, in the tone of propitiation, 'chances are, she can dance. She's not had time to forget, and nowadays kids are taught, and that kid would be taught decently, owing to circumstances. Confound him.'

'Don't you like Claude?' said Agatha.

'I dislike parents, on principle,' said Johnny, sliding his right arm completely round her.

'Wait till you are one,' said Agatha.

He was silent again, till they reached the end of the terrace, where one of the most lovely views of a beautiful district jumped at them, and he brought her to a stand perforce. He watched the view a minute. Then his eyes slipped to hers in his sly, shy fashion with the people he liked.

'What are you after, Mother? Wanting to manage me,—or both of us? Ursula too?'

'Nothing further from my thoughts,' she said, with perfect sincerity. Indeed, her last thought was to interfere with him, where Ursula was concerned.

Johnny steered with great art among women, a gift inherited: he was quick in apprehension of the probable 'moves,' on the feminine side of the social game, and equally clever at flattering or foiling them. He knew Ursula so well already: it amused his mother, the ease with which he disposed of her,—knowledgeably,—for she had never struck Agatha as an easy character. It would need all his wit to deal with her, in the time to come.

'Perhaps she really wants to look after the kiddy,' he murmured after an interval. 'She doesn't look strong.'

'I shouldn't wonder,' said his mother, rather gently. The prospect from the terrace, shimmering in the dreamy sunlight of an October morning, was miraculous even to Agatha's accustomed eyes. She had been ill, lately, a fact which lends miracle to the most familiar things. She tried to see the future in the mist-laden, blue-drenched

beauty of the distant autumn woodland, John's future, not her own. She dared not look at her own beyond a certain point, owing to the discretion of the doctors.

'Anyhow I'll see to it, you needn't bother,' his thoughts ultimately resolved themselves, as his slack arm drew tight about her. Mrs. Thynne from her post in the breakfast-room observed their promenade together with surprise. Her grown sons never treated her like that,—indeed she would have been puzzled to know what to say to them if they had.

'I'm not bothering,' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'That is, I'm only bothering, as usual, why Higham Wood up there remains yellow to my intelligence, while my eyes tell me it is blue.'

'Cause you know it is,' suggested Johnny. He studied the far horizon a minute, motionless, debating the point. 'Oh, dash,' he ejaculated after an interval. 'It does look blue, but it can't be really, or being yellow, it would be green. And it's not green, anyhow. Is it, Mother?' He shook her.

'Blue,' said Mrs. Ingestre calmly. 'Azure,—look at it.'

'Oh, I've looked, ten years back,—I wish you wouldn't mix my mind! It's always been yellow,—it's a beech-wood. Dash!' said Johnny again. 'Look here, we'll cut across there riding this afternoon, and I'll fetch you a leaf to look at. Bet you anything it won't be a blue leaf. Take me, Mother?'

'Very well,' she said. 'I'll take you in reason. But don't go too far out of your way.'

'Oh, Ursula likes playing about,' said Johnny easily. 'By that time, she will.' Agatha had small doubt of it, but she did not encourage him. 'And the floor of the wood's good going for the horses,—clean,' he proceeded with his plans. 'And Rachel will let me stand up on her back to pick you a leaf, at least she will if Ursula talks to her, and distracts her young mind. 'Course if Rachel starts at a rabbit,' said Johnny with pathos, 'I'm done.'

I'm not a circus-rider,—lots of rabbits in Higham Wood. I hope she won't for your sake, Mother,—sake of your leaf, I mean.'

Mrs. Ingestre declined to be affected: she alleged that she trusted Ursula. Whereupon Johnny, recovering, said he was sick of talking rubbish, and was going in. She withheld him a few minutes longer from his duties to learn about the house-party, the threads of which were in his hands, since the majority were his contemporaries. She alluded to his father as arriving at lunch-time. Instantly—

'If Father wants to cut into the ride,' said Johnny with a beautiful scowl, 'he can't, that's all. I've arranged it. Ursula prefers riding, remember, Mother: I'm going to see she prefers it, now.'

'See,' said his mother, 'and don't get excited. And remember yourself that what Ursula prefers, this side her wedding, is done. One minute, dear,—when's Jem coming? Two nights then?—oh, most gracious!'

She referred to her son's best man, and closest friend, and at the reference Johnny's unpleasant expression cleared at once. James Hertford was a friend, not a follower like Bertram. Johnny knew his own mind precisely in that matter which youth in general regards with such astonishing indifference, the choosing of friends. He chose at ease, entered, and shut the door behind him. It was another little problem her radiant future held for Ursula.

Things with Ursula were not quite so simple as Johnny thought, which doubtless repaid him for his self-sufficiency.

Ursula was sitting sewing things for her own wearing in the glass bow of the breakfast-room, within a short tether of her mother, as was her habit. Ursula was anything but a new kind of girl, which was one of the reasons why the Ingestre men liked her. A woman's hands always look beautiful when they are sewing, and there is a per-

manent—a prehistoric appeal in the contented sewing face. What can be done with that patient little dart of a needle!—it is a symbol of the plodding, piecemeal way in which women attack the web of their lives.

Johnny brought a sop to Ursula in the news of Mrs. Clewer's defection. She had refused the dance because his mother had not asked her last Ambassador. This had distinctly a softening effect,—Ursula smiled and said she did not believe it. A little later she said it was a pity because Mrs. Clewer looked so lovely in the evening. Johnny opined that it was a pity, because Janie could dance.

'I believe that's all you think about,' said Ursula.

'He's no heart, really,' said Ursula's mother, in a tone like hers, but a little more so.

Johnny debated these charges. 'I haven't, on me,' he said to Ursula's mother, a reply calculated to content her, which it did. A little wit went a long way with Ursula's mother, but he had to consider its quality with care before he applied it. After that he came close to Ursula, blocking her view of her mother completely, and proposed a ride in the afternoon, ending up with circus-tricks on the horses in Higham Woods.

'Very well,' said Ursula, with a glance at the blue woods on the horizon, which she could see from where she sat. It was a calculating glance, not at all like Mrs. Ingestre's, when she had looked that way.

'It's not going to rain,' said John, in natural response to it.

'Rain!' said Ursula.

'Well, you shouldn't go looking carefully at my nice blue sky. Nobody ever does, and it's not used to it.'

'It's not your blue sky,' said Ursula. She put out a hand to remove him. He was in her light.

'It is. I got it for you on purpose. It's even been infecting the beech-leaves, Mother says.'

'Infecting,' said Ursula ; but she let him have her hand. 'I was only wondering,' she said, with another glance at the woods, 'if that child would care to come with us. It might do her good.'

Johnny opened his mouth. 'What's this?' he thought, in the depths of his being, racking his brains. Ursula certainly took some following.

'Her father didn't want her to be tired, dear,' said Mrs. Thynne, in a tone of gentle reminder. 'I think she's a bit of a cold.'

'Who says so?' said Johnny instantly.

'Mother does,' smiled Ursula. 'Her father only meant late hours, and so on. The sun will do her good.'

'I can perfectly well amuse her at home,' said Mrs. Thynne, maternally, to both of them.

'Well, it's just as John likes,' said Ursula.

'Not at all,' said Johnny. He scanned the Higham horizon with humorous dark eyes. He was amused. What the deuce could she be at, in such a proposal? It was their last chance of a *tête-à-tête* ride, for days. Punishing him? Simply righting herself, in his eyes,—or her mother's,—or her own? A queer instinct, feminine, no doubt. Or could she really want the child?—not possible. Johnny knew, by a beautiful instinct we will not defend, that Ursula wanted him, and him alone, for the space of that autumn day.

Well then, he might have fallen in with the desire, which matched his own. He might, sweeping the sewing and the subterfuges aside, say—'Oh, rot!'—and seize Ursula's hands. So he would have done, if her mother had not been there, or if his own mother had been. His mother knew nothing of such crab-like proceedings. But Ursula's mother, or something of her in Ursula, inspired Johnny to be crab-like also,—crabbier indeed,—even more crabbed. He could be, at need.

A second course open to him was to give the message to Violet, and get her to refuse, which would be quite simple

as it was highly improbable she would want to come. He could manage that with the smallest possible exertion, and leave Violet to be—amused by Mrs. Thynne. Oh, Lord!—he reconsidered.

His third course was what he did, as soon as he thought of it. He turned about. 'Markham,' he said, with passion. 'You know everything.'

'Yes, sir,' said Markham repressively.

'Can you tell me, at this instant, where, in earth, or sky, or water, Miss Ashwin is?'

'Miss Violet is helping the doctor to pack, sir,' said Markham, folding the cloth.

'The deuce she is. Well, tell her to drop it, would you, and come to me.'

Miss Violet was fetched,—not, of course, by Markham. She coloured pink at the proposal, and looked her protest, in Johnny's direction, just as he expected.

'Miss Thynne's idea,' said Johnny pleasantly, looking back. He thought her like Alice in Wonderland. So, oddly enough, did Bert. Her eyes were like that,—her hair was otherwise. 'She thinks it would be good for you, —jolly for you, I mean.'

'I think,' hesitated Violet, 'that Cousin Agatha—'

'Mother lies down in the afternoon,' said Ursula at once. 'I should think you'd be better for some exercise,—wouldn't you?'

'Wouldn't you?' echoed Johnny attentively. '*Just* as you like.'

Well, that finished her. She did not believe they really wanted her, of course, not for a moment. But after a puzzled pause, balancing all the precedents of her prolonged existence, like a proper little girl, she accepted Miss Thynne, thanked her, and so came.

John, thinking with her, had come to the same conclusion, that it was the only thing she could do. And she did it in the form, nicely. He rather wondered if he owed her an apology.

'You are a pawn, darling,' he said later. 'Do you know what a pawn is?'

'Chess?' said Violet.

They were waiting for Ursula in the sun-bath on the drive at two o'clock. He and she were alone, in the company of the horses, Rachel, the beloved of Johnny's heart, and Sabra and Sylvie, introduced merely as 'nice girls.' A tactful young groom, who had offered himself, had been refused with an arrogant brusquerie, on Mr. John's part, approaching to rudeness. He was not going to let his cousin Violet ride with a groom on this occasion,—likely! They would be *à trois*, since Ursula desired it. Very much so.

Johnny was moody a trifle, because his father had returned. His father, in the course of lunch, had already disturbed several of his best arrangements, on purpose; his mother looked worried again, and things in general were going to pot. It was his father who was delaying Ursula now, keeping her flirting with him in the hall. Flirting was the word. Ursula was a punctual girl, by nature.

'Isn't it heavenly?' said Violet, as he mounted her.

'It is,' said Johnny, and held her little foot for a moment.

He waited a little; then flung himself into the saddle, somewhat to his Rachel's surprise. Not much,—she was as used to him as Markham and the rest of the household. He sat for a time looking about him from the upper level. Heavenly it was,—no weather in the year's length like it. Shot blue and gold, touched with melting, maddening odours from the drenched dead woodland of oak and beech for miles around. His father could mount Ursula,—he had more than a mind to start, more than half a mind. He was sure the kid wanted to be in the woods as much as he did. He looked at her sitting Sylvie demurely, with her lashes dropped. She was a good kid, awfully well-brought-up, but there were possibilities—oh yes. He would not

answer for her behaviour, after a gallop across the common at his side. She was young. . . .

'Can I get to be a Queen?' she asked, in reply to his sudden remark about the pawn.

'If you're good,' said Johnny impressively. 'I,' he proceeded presently, 'am a Knight.'

'Don't fall off,' said Violet. Her knowledge of the game, needless to say, hailed from an impeccable authority.

'You don't catch me,' said her cousin. 'No one can catch me anyhow, being a Knight. Do you know the Knight's move, Violet? It's an exceedingly dodge-ful one.'

'You can be taken,' said Violet gravely.

'Married, you mean?'

'No,—taken. By anyone, in the game.'

'No, I can't,' said Johnny. 'Not by anyone, anywhere. I'm too dodge-ful, by a lot.' His tone was such that she could not argue it.

'I suppose your father is a Castle,' she said, after an interval.

'All you know,' said Johnny, grinning. 'Father's as dodge-ful as I am,—all but. I get it from him.'

'Is he a Knight, then?—he can't be, he's too old. He must be a King.'

'No, he isn't, because you can't check him,' explained Johnny. 'If anybody had ever been able to check Father,—I should not be here.'

'I suppose Miss Thynne is a Queen,' said Violet, after a pause of regarding him. She had not asked where he would be, in that case.

'She may be,' answered Johnny, 'one of these days. She's a bit further on than you.' He patted Rachel, looking wicked.

'But'—she turned on him scandalised—'she can't be only a——'

'Course she can't,' said Johnny soothingly. 'Look at her,—there she is,'

Johnny's other goddess arose in the magic of the autumn beech-woods,—he might have known she would : altering all values, thrusting love-making and Ursula temporarily into the background, and bringing the friendly little girl, just as surely as music brought her, to his side.

It was entirely Ursula's fault that it was so, that Violet was there, to begin with, so disturbing a presence, inconclusive like all youthful things, sweet to see and to hold,—or to attempt to hold. Because, being so much the lightest, it was naturally she who did the circus-trick, and mounted Johnny's Rachel, while Rachel, perfectly contented with the temporary exchange, snuffed at all his pockets, and nuzzled in his hands. Neither hands nor pockets held anything, but she nuzzled his thin brown hands for love of him, while she performed his will by standing quiet, amid strange scents and exciting shadows, under the shimmering arch of leaves. Rachel was young, like Violet : but she had faced calmly, owing to her faith in him, even stranger circumstances.

' Good girl,' said Johnny, putting an arm suddenly across her neck.

' Do be careful, John !' said Ursula irritably : and at once the creature started, as she had not for John. Could it be ? Rachel felt Ursula without the magic circle too.

' Don't break the trees about,' said Johnny mechanically, looking upward. But he knew the child would not. She cut the twigs of golden leaves he wanted for his mother neatly and swiftly, just as he would have done himself, the finger-tips of her right hand extended to the beech-trunk for support. But she hardly needed it. Of course, he reflected once, she would dance delightfully, made like that. Only once, reaching to an outer branch, she laid her left hand for balance on his head. It thrilled John, very oddly : and he held her a minute in his arms before he lifted her down. Exactly so he had seen her father clasp her at parting,—not otherwise.

It seemed simply profanity to him, at that moment, that Ursula, his wife to be, could even for an instant mistake his proceeding in doing so. It outraged the real Johnny, jarred a true instinct of his fathers, that had sprung during that brief interlude to life. He was amazed at the tumult of revolt it caused him,—granted it was the case. He glanced at Ursula, a moment too late to be certain. She was seated, fair and serious, on Sabra, holding Sylvie's bridle, waiting merely, apparently content. She was just as she should be, exactly, except that the magic circle stopped at her. Yet, of the group of three, she should have been the most surely within it. Surely!

—No, he was not amused, no longer amused, that was what it came to. He would have to urge Rachel outside the magic ring of art, the youth which matches it; the aged, irrefutable truths of the woodland, before he could be amused at women's pettiness again. He did not, for the instant, believe such limitation desirable:—even though it was purely flattering to him.

Ursula said that she supposed they had better be going.

'Why?' said Johnny.

Ursula replied, very sensibly, that they had all the leaves they could carry, and that they must have good light for getting across the fields. She added that it would be getting damp before they reached the Hall, and that it would be wiser not to linger, owing to Violet's cold. She was determined that Violet should have a cold, no doubt for her mother's credit. Violet, when pressed, admitted to having a little one.

'Dancing'll cure it, darling,' said Johnny absently.

Ursula was not pleased. They did not talk much on the homeward way. The scenery was very beautiful.

Things went from bad to worse after that. It was again amusing at intervals, but not exceedingly. Of course the houseful of 'lads,' regardless of Johnny's severity with them, spoiled the infant. Ursula ought to have had the

sense to know they would. Johnny's mother had had the sense, before they came. They gave Miss Thynne her dues at intervals, as they thought, but she was Johnny's property. That was the bother of it. He, and he alone, was bound to pull things straight.

James Hertford was the worst offender. James said Violet was clever, which had not struck either Johnny or Bert before. It was rather a trial for them, but they admitted Jemmy ought to know. He was a very, very smart young man from Oxford, engaged in appropriately opening a brilliant public career. Mr. Ingestre liked talking to him, which was all to the good, since it gave John a breathing-space to attend to Ursula. His father's way of snatching Ursula and exalting her, ostentatiously, annoyed Johnny. He was sufficient in himself to that sort of thing, and did not require, at his age, to be shown how to do the trick.

James happened upon Violet at luncheon, sitting at his side. Having discovered, he need not have noticed her, but he did, satirically. 'Comin' to the dance?' he drawled. 'Got any left? Might spare me one if you have.'

This struck his neighbours as amusing, and a certain number attended.

'I don't think I'm dancing,' said Violet, shrinking a little at so many eyes. She had Miss Thynne's eyes as well, as soon as she said it.

'Oh, I say,' protested Mr. Hertford. 'Why's that? Getting past it?'

'Youthful follies,' said another wit. 'Women are so serious nowadays.'

'It's only they're so numerous,' said Violet.

'Hey?—what's that?' Young Hertford, catching a spark from his host on the way, leant down. 'Too many of them? Can't be too many, can there, Johnny? Think we're afraid of numbers, Miss—er—Ashwin?'

'No. But you can't dance with two at once.'

'Wish I could,' ventured Mr. Dering, in the pause that followed this unanswerable statement.

'So does my mother,' said Johnny. 'It's a fact there aren't enough of you fellows to go round. May as well be warned in time, so as to keep the price up.'

'But you'll give me one, all the same,' said Jem to Violet, when this point had been dealt with. 'Oh yes, you will. Sit down if you like,—we old ones will quiz the company. Come now, say which.' He laid his dance-programme on the table in front of him, and she glanced down the half-filled list.

'It's no good,' she said gravely. 'I am engaged those three, and I go to bed *there*.' She spaced the three clearly, and touched the sixth number with one fine little finger. 'I am sorry,' she added, looking up at him.

'Ripping, ain't she?' said Mr. Hertford, far too loud, in another direction. 'Ripping form. I'm going to get one, dashed if I don't.'

'Don't be an ass,' advised Johnny.

'What d'you stick me in such company for, then?' argued James; and proceeded to devote the whole of his elaborate mind to Violet's single entertainment.

It was unfortunate, because when young Hertford really talked, everybody was bound to attend to him. There was an Oxford glow about James, mellow, as it were, from the Magdalen cellars, that even Johnny could not equal. He did not want to equal it. James in common life, behind scenes, was excellent company: but James when he played to the public ear was an ass. It was not his fault really, since he was in training to go into Parliament. But even that was an asinine object, when you came to think about it. James 'represented a class,' as Mrs. Clewer said, like Bertram; but nobody wanted either of them, really. Except Johnny, who wanted both.

Things reached the breaking-point, and Johnny decided.

The occasion would be spoiled for somebody, and it could not be Ursula, because it was her dance, and she

was in the forefront. It could not be himself for—plenty of reasons. He was in the forefront too. Something had got to go ; and pawns, though far from negligible to the good player, may generally be sacrificed at a pinch.

Besides, the kid had a cold. Even his own mother, urged by Ursula, said so, though she made light of it. Johnny weighed all the chances, with considerable enjoyment, during the night preceding the dance, and adopted a Knight's move ; a Knight's move lengthwise, so that he might get in front of Ursula, whose feminine pawn-steps were necessarily cautious. The simile was most apt.

'I'm beastly sorry, darling,' said Johnny, with deep commiseration, in his mother's little private room. 'Ursula says you've got a beastly cold.'

'Not a bad one,' said Violet. She looked questioning.

'I shouldn't be the least surprised,' said Johnny, falling into a chair exactly facing her, 'if it got worse. Much worse, before the evening. My cold. Do you mind?'

Violet explored his face. He was a truly amazing person, unusual, but charming too. She quite saw why the horses and so on liked him so. He knew what he wanted so exactly, and made his desires so particularly clear. It might, of course, be his training as his mother's only son. His forehead was slightly knitted now, but his eyes, as usual, were confident. It was a relief to people in spiritual or social difficulties even to be faced with such as Johnny.

He offered her a clear solution for a problem that had become too much for her. Violet was a nice little girl. She was chiefly anxious, as children of her age are, to do the right thing. She was aware of not having done this, from Miss Thynne's point of view, over the music the first evening : but then her father had been backing her. Now the guide she trusted utterly in life had deserted her, with a very simple warning to be useful to her hostess, and not to get in the way. This was obviously Miss Thynne's desire also, as it was Violet's,—only she did like dancing. That was her simple position.

Urged by Miss Thynne, she had been considering her cold : but her life's education was against the exaggeration of colds, brought up as she had been in a medical household. To have her own cold, to prevent her getting in Miss Thynne's way at the dance, would have worried her exceedingly. Her father might hear of it. To have her cousin John's cold was so simple. *His* cold could be posed about to any extent. She saw it at once.

' Oh, of course I will if you like,' she said shyly.

' My colds,' said Johnny, leaning back, ' have complications towards evening of a really frightful description. You ask Mother,—she won't have forgotten. I often wonder I never died of them in my extreme youth. The first signs——'

' Yes ? ' said Violet.

' Were sinister. I think that's the word. Not fever, of course, precisely——'

' No,' said Violet, ' because of the thermometer.'

' Things can be done with it,' said Johnny. ' However, we won't stop over that. Feeling awful by degrees is the kind of thing anybody can do. By slow degrees, mind. Not at a moment's notice, or they'll think it's a fit and stand round expecting symptoms. I have done that——'

' Have you ? ' said Violet.

' For stage purposes. Only for the stage. Once, I had a seizure——' he paused. ' I deserved it, though. My past life had been such as you can't think. I never bothered Mother with that, though,—might have scared her. The kind of thing I did for home consumption was easier, much. Mother found me out nine times out of ten in my diseases : but even she thought well of my—er—culminating colds. They culminated splendidly. I pretty nearly always brought them off.'

' Did you have them at school ? ' asked Violet.

' Not so often. Mother warned the women there, and they—er—took me in time.'

' Didn't she ? ' asked Violet.

'Not if I was careful. I got in first. It takes practice.'

'Do they hurt?' asked Violet, after an interval.

'Oh no,' said Johnny, surprised. 'Rather soothing than otherwise, or I should never expect you to have one.'

He held out a hand to her. It struck him that she was not extremely well. At least she was relieved to be clear of debating and to be taken in hand. By rights, perhaps,—by the code,—he should have done it sooner. The code of common friendship applied to her, he believed.

'Won't your mother find out?' she asked simply.

'Probably,' said Johnny, with emphasis, and paused. 'But then she won't write home and tell about you,' he mentioned. 'So it's all to the good.'

'Oh no,—I hope she won't.' She looked alarmed: Johnny smiled.

'I'll see she doesn't,' he said. 'You sit tight,—I'll look after it.' He talked a little more, for his amusement, not for long, because there was no need. Clever or no, her intelligence suited his, and they were in sympathy. He would explain to the lads, he said, when she asked him. Unless she preferred to have a few of them upstairs to sit out with her: that could be managed easily.

'Mightn't they catch it?' Violet objected.

'Don't you want 'em?' said Johnny. 'Bert'll be beastly disappointed.' He was her host for the minute,—then he changed his nature. 'Jemmy'll get over it, he's other fish to fry. He came here for the purpose. Personally—' he paused, deeply cogitating,—'I've lots to do.'

'Of course you have,' said Violet, colouring.

'I've eight dances,' said Johnny, 'with Miss Thynne alone: and the nine over,—the nine extra ones,—the nine odd women,—will lead me a life, for certain.' His brow corrugated. He was plunged in teasing thought.

'I wish I was a man,' said Violet.

'Then you could help,' suggested Johnny. He looked at her a minute. 'No,' he determined at leisure, 'you're best as you are. That's the fact. You sit tight, and

you'll see I'll solve it, without any such strong measures.' He regarded her again. 'I'm sorry about this, my little girl,' he said. 'I'd like to dance with you. See that?' She saw with a nod: that was the host. 'And I don't break engagements, on this earth, unless I must.' She nodded again. That was just the family. 'But I don't,' said Johnny, becoming himself, and burying his head in the cushions, 'want to catch a culminating cold, because Ursula would be *anxious* about me. She wouldn't think of *letting* me, probably. Oh, Lord!' He hid his face motionless for a moment. Then he started up.

'But I *can't*,' he ejaculated, smashing his fist into the other palm, 'because it's my own cold! Catch your own cold,—it's a medical impossibility. Gosh!—done it!—I shall tell her.'

He went away to do so.

Johnny's last interview before Ursula's dance,—which was an immense success,—was a stiff one, because complicated. He had to put it off a bit, what with the houseful of 'lads,' and his father bothering. He might have known the day would get crowded; as it went on. However, he tackled it in the end.

'Oh, poor little thing!' said Ursula.

Johnny could not think why that exclamation annoyed him so. It came too late. . . . Owing to being crowded and so on, he was not in a very nice mood internally, inclined to trampling,—to trample at large. His servant Blandy had discovered it already, before Ursula came. Ursula herself was in some danger. Then his mother, looking rather delicate in black lace, turned up in Ursula's wake. Johnny had both his women, and so the balance of life was preserved.

'I didn't quite like the look of her this morning,' said Ursula.

'I'd an idea you didn't, darling,' said Johnny with sympathy. 'One to you.'

'I even mentioned it to Mother,' said Ursula. 'But——'
'Just so,' said Johnny.

Ursula was looking her best, better than her best, since she was unusually excited; and she was dressed up to the nines, quite rippingly, in pale blue silk. This conference, it had better be hastily confessed, lest with an inadvertent reference we might offend our readers, took place in Johnny's dressing-room. If there should arise an instant outcry to demand how Miss Thynne got there, we can only repeat that the dressing-room was Johnny's. It was no fault of his. Since the women insisted on crowding him up, even in his private apartment, he resigned himself, and dismissed his attendant. Not that he did not want Blandy,—he was half-dressed. It was singular how he was fated to see to everything to-night, even the most essential things, single-handed.

'John,—do you mind?' said Ursula, tapping the door.

'You can go, Blandy,' said Johnny to his slave. 'Sit down, Ursula. This is very jolly.'

'Don't be absurd,' said Ursula, smiling. 'And don't tell Mother, for goodness' sake.'

'Don't tell her mother, for goodness' sake,' pleaded Johnny with his own mother, who turned up two minutes afterwards.

Ursula had come, with the best excuse, about some flowers. John and his father had each given her beautiful flowers, and she particularly wished to do the proper thing. Johnny helped her with advice on the subject, and reduced her to laughter very soon. She was really excited, a little beyond herself, or she would never have thought of her present proceeding. But he would not give her the plain answer she wanted. He was tiresome.

Johnny's mother came with a message, or rather a remark, from his father about the wine. Mrs. Ingestre translated it. Johnny replied with another remark,—a real quencher,—had there been any hope his mother would convey it correctly. He settled that matter in no time,—

it was shorter than Ursula's. It was really stimulating to be so universally in demand as he was this evening: but it did not excite him, the contrary. It soothed his restlessness, and rendered him supremely calm.

'My dear Ursula!' said Mrs. Ingestre, stopping amazed. She was a strong-minded lady, but there are limits.

'I know, Mother,' said the girl, still laughing. 'But he is so——'

'I can't think what's come over her,' said Johnny, modestly engaged with his toilet. There was a short interval.

'Blandy won't talk,' observed Johnny, conscious of disapproval somewhere in the atmosphere. Through his elbows possibly,—his back was turned at the time.

'You'll be late, dear,' said Mrs. Ingestre, and the disapproval materialised.

'It's only,' said Ursula, capturing her sedateness, 'that John won't give me the facts. That child's not really ill, is she, Mother?'

'Ill?' said the mistress of the house. 'What do you mean?'

So Johnny told her, in order. Poor kid had a beastly cold, and was stopping up for the evening. Beastly hard luck on her. All the lot of them sick about it,—and Markham in tears.

'How odd of Violet not to tell me,' said Mrs. Ingestre, coming inside the door. She was on the trail. Johnny would really have to steer adroitly, between the pair of them. He begged his mother to take a seat.

'You'll be late,' said Mrs. Ingestre, 'and your father——' However, she sat down. Johnny, in his shirt-sleeves, prepared to play to an audience: not by any means for the first time in his life.

'She wants to stop upstairs,' he explained, 'and have cocoa and biscuits, which are things I love. So does Bert love them,—so does Jemmy. It's a frightful temptation for all of us. Only Jem said it must be the right sort of

biscuits,—that's just the Oxford way. He's been boring Violet on the biscuit question,—as if it matters ! '

' Men are extraordinary,' murmured Ursula. She just believed it though, having brothers. She looked towards Mrs. Ingestre, for a lead.

' Johnny,' said Mrs. Ingestre, ' what do you *mean* about Jem ? Is Violet in bed ? '

' Rather,' said Johnny. ' Thought she'd better go early, you know. Saves fag on these occasions. I took the lads up to say good night to her lately. That's how I got late. She wanted to say she couldn't dance with 'em, and so on. She's a civil little girl.'

After a blank pause—' I never heard of such a thing,' said Ursula indignantly.

' You see,' said Johnny, settling to his subject, ' I told Violet, James was a stiff character, apt to turn nasty about nothing, when women cut him and didn't explain. He's not used to that, up at Magdalen. It bothered Violet a bit, and I didn't want that either. I thought—er—Ursula would disapprove. The kid's not exactly feverish, Mother—you remember ? Not over normal, anyhow,—nor under it,—kind of betwixt and between. I—er—hardly liked the look of her.'

' Well ? ' said Mrs. Ingestre. Johnny shifted at once to get a view of her in the glass.

' Nothing more,' he said hastily. ' I took Jem up,—then Bert tacked on to us. Billy would have come at a call. It was the cocoa in Bill's case, probably,—he's not a lady's man.' Another expressive pause,—over-expressive. ' We only sat about a bit conversing,' said Johnny artlessly. ' Violet didn't mind us much.'

Mrs. Ingestre looked upon the admirable Ursula, and thought upon the impeccable Jem. She said nothing, because there was nothing to be gained by saying. Johnny was well ahead of her in his disposition of her otherwise quite respectable household. There was no curbing him in his present mood, she was aware. He had slipped a look

to her lately, at once gleaming and lowering, that she knew. She had best not interfere with his private arrangements. Instead, she looked towards the door.

'Don't go, Mother,' said Johnny appealingly. 'It's all right, give you my word. She's all rolled up like a little dormouse, like a little guinea-pig,—jolly nice. She does as she's told, brought up to it. And she was laughing when we left. I made her laugh, not Jemmy,—and I saw to her too. Fact is—' Johnny regarded himself and his tie, separately and in combination,—'fact is, I feel a bit responsible.'

'What?' said Agatha.

'Yes. She caught it from me.'

'What?' said Ursula. She stared, and even paled a little, in the effort of comprehending him, or in the effort not to comprehend.

'I gave it her, darling, I'm afraid. These things hang about so. Why,—' Johnny regarded his tie again,—'it's years since I had my bad colds. Isn't it, Mother? It must be years.'

Ursula still stared a moment. 'Oh,' she said, 'he's talking nonsense, Mother. We had better leave him alone.'

'I think so,' said Mrs. Ingestre.

'Don't,' said Johnny pathetically, 'I'm not half-dressed yet. It's such a bore ragging Blandy all alone. Can't make a trade of that, like Father.' He bit his lip as he glanced in the mirror. 'Mother, ducky, don't fag! I tell you I've seen to it. Can't you take my word?'

It was useless, Mrs. Ingestre had risen. 'Be quick, Johnny,' she said with composure—not at all Ursula's composure—and left the room.

Silence reigned in Johnny's quarters. Ursula was a nice quiet girl,—peaceful. Peace was to be Johnny's portion henceforward, a capital thing. Peace, and obedience,—that above all. His mother omitted to obey, occasionally: she had really left the scene before she need. But then

she might be concerned as to his father's judgment of this high-handed treatment of his little kinswoman under his roof,—that was conceivable. Violet's mother, if not Violet, counted for lots in the family. As for Ursula,—it was really quite doubtful if she followed his ingenious reproof at all.

'I can't stop,' remarked Ursula, feeling the outlines of her hair.

'It looks ripping, don't disturb it,' said Johnny, whose back was still towards her. He was frowning a little in his glass, though,—very upright,—very like his father for the instant, but that the frown was faintly anxious too.

Ursula folded her hands. 'Anyhow, I expect it's all for the best,' she said presently. 'The child, I mean,—she'll be off your Mother's mind.'

'Yes,' said Johnny simply. 'It's what you wanted, isn't it? I say,—you don't awfully mind my taking it out of your hands?'

'It might save trouble, in the future,' said Ursula, smoothing her skirts down all round her, 'if you let me know in good time what you wanted, instead——'

'You knew what I wanted perfectly well.'

'Don't,' said Ursula,—at the tone.

'You knew what I wanted perfectly well,' said Johnny, changing the tone, and his appearance. 'Didn't you? Didn't you, darling? Just say.'

She smiled uncertainly, looking aside. 'Oh, well, what you want's not the only thing in the world.'

'Oh, I say! Isn't it right yet?' He approached her chaffing. 'Tell me what else I've got to do?'

'Not that, anyhow,' said Ursula, half-laughing, holding him off. 'No, John,—really. The idea! Do be sensible a little instead of—ragging. It's only—I'm always ready to do anything, in reason. I only want to—to look ahead.'

'Well, look ahead,' he said, calmly and sweepingly. 'Let's do it, while we can, for the Lord's sake. That's what I want as well.'

'Not now,—nonsense!' She was scandalised, really nervous. 'John, really, do *think*,' she said.

'What am I to think of?' asked Johnny.

'Blandy,—anyone,—you're not even dressed.'

'Get along, I'm as much as you are,' he said carelessly.

Pause.

'Shocked?' enquired Johnny, looking sidelong at her under his drooping eyelids. He had her within his arm, quite comfortably, for all her prudish effort to get away. Her attempted horror was prudish also, the relics of an intolerable training, from which he had somehow to get her free.

Sometimes Ursula believed John liked making her uncomfortable, that he aimed at that. Every now and then he would say things like that, which 'men' in the abstract thought, no doubt, but no gentleman spoke aloud. No gentleman of Ursula's category. John's father, for instance, was more distinguished in his phraseology in front of women, though he might be accustomed to think things twice as bad.

She tried now to despise him as a schoolboy, and a horrid one, but she could not bring it off. Yet he had not the pull in age over her: she herself had, by a month or two, the superiority. His father had married a woman of nearly his own age too. The Ingestres had no age to speak of: they developed young and wore splendidly. They got the pull in other ways, a cool expectation, a royal egoism, together with a driving, startling force on others that was electrical,—the hackneyed 'magnetic' was not the word. Too much so for Ursula, really. She hated to be startled, it numbed her. She was really, tacitly, begging him not to drive her, work her too hard, in that plea to be forewarned.

Johnny accepted it, sensitively. He left her soon, and went back to his business. She had trusted herself near him, so, though she looked 'beastly pretty' in her nervousness, he took no advantage. His distinguished father would probably have taken advantage, had Ursula guessed.

His conclusion was that it was all right,—that it had got to be. He believed she was fond of him, even very fond, once he got through her guard. It took a pretty good effort to get through it, though,—but then she was but half out of her shell. She was a handsome girl and a nice girl,—and a good one, of course. He was perfectly convinced of her virtues,—he only wondered a little at his weariness when she had gone.

As for the evening that followed, there was nothing wrong with it. The dance went brilliantly off, as entertainments did, when the two Ingestres were in competition to make them go. Johnny would have been good alone,—with his father to harass him he was brilliant. It was a curious but invariable fact, some deep truth of their natures. He was the best dancer on the floor, with ease, he flirted disgracefully, and the nine 'odd women,' manipulated with transcendent art, thought him with one accord delightful.

'I say, Miss Thynne looks pretty ripping, don't she?' said the simple Bert to Jem Hertford, at one juncture. 'Johnny's in luck.'

Jem Hertford did not reply, and Bert did not miss it. Followers may take views like that, but friends are constituted otherwise. Hertford did not want Ingestre to be married. It was the wrong thing for him. Johnny was finer, as it were, at large, defying authority, taking what he wanted of those that passed, a gentleman of the road. That was how Jem always saw him, he had the type, and he looked the part, when he roamed the world in Rachel's company. And then he went and linked himself to a girl like that, whom any fool might have married! Sickening! It was almost enough to make Jem chuck his ambitions, and sink into matrimony himself.

PART I

INDEX

THE ASPIRANT

I

WE pass ten years : and the chronicle resettles upon a certain season when Captain Falkland's family, ably commanded by Captain Falkland's wife, came to London from Dorsetshire, and took up their abode in their fine new mansion in Coburg Place, south of the Park.

The Falklands were excellent country people by taste and origin, small squires for several generations back, dividing their attention between serving their country in the field abroad, and tilling its neglected soil at home ; but the Captain's wife touched commerce through her relations, and wealth accrued to her during her married life with such persistent partiality, that it became incumbent on her—so she said—to marry her younger girl really well. Everything, said Mrs. Falkland, pointed to a move. Her son Harold had just left Oxford, where he had lived in a style exceeding anything they could provide for him in the old country home : her elder daughter was already settled in moderate married ease in town : Helena, having left her last school, was in need of fashionable finishing by lectures, classes, hair-specialists, and other mysteries, before she faced the world the following season : and there was no reason Helena should not do as well or better than Constance, if only Helena's father would let his wife manage. So the Captain,—who had no wish whatever to rid himself of his schoolgirl daughter, of whom he was fond,—sadly concurred : made a farewell tour of his favourite walks and prospects : and taking Lesbia—known to the Captain's environment as ' the finest dog in

the world'—with him as consolation, followed his women-kind to London.

Arrived there, he still advanced no objection, though the house his wife chose to live in struck him as far too large. He found, however, that his son, who had been at a smart college, and being a smart specimen, had emerged therefrom with a very high Class, and no particular wish to do anything further in life, disagreed with him. Harold looked round the living-rooms in Coburg Place, and pronounced them 'decent,' though he begged his sister to keep a hand on his mother's antediluvian decorative impulses. His own room he took into his own accomplished hands, and would have taken Helena's also, only she had a scruple about hurting her mother's feelings. So Harold deferred agreeably to the scruple, since girls go in for such things, and merely presented his sister with a framed study of something very homely, by one of our very newest masters, to hang on her walls; and warned her which way up she ought to hang it—just in time.

Two or three months after settling in, when they were all beginning to get accustomed to city circumstances and superfluous space, Captain Falkland had an idea. This occurred to him now and then, but he did not often get beyond the announcement of it, for he was easily discouraged by a feminine frown. His inspirations broke in glory over the household at luncheon-time, and faded into the melancholy might-have-been before the dinner-gong ceased clanging in the hall. On this occasion however the Captain stuck to his colours with unwonted determination, and something actually came of it.

The occasion of the idea was as follows. It came to the ears of Captain Falkland that the son of his old comrade-in-arms, then Captain, since Major, and now Colonel Auberon, and his own son's school and college friend, was deliberately living on his wits in town, in comparative indigence and obscurity. This was the eldest, by a good seven years, of Colonel Auberon's young family, which

was quartered in India, and of whom only the elder boy and girl were in England. Of the girl the Falklands knew little, since she lived with a clever aunt at Hampstead. Of the boy Quentin they had seen a good deal in the past, though not recently,—he had been Harold's most admired friend at school. That Harold should admire anyone was enough in itself to impress the Falklands; that he should persist in his high valuation of young Auberon throughout his cynical Oxford day, was yet more striking. The boys' colleges were different, their sets barely crossed, since Auberon belonged by choice rather than necessity to the group of young men who had their way to make; yet Harold continued, with quiet pertinacity, to seek his society, repeat his opinions, and 'back' him as destined to the biggest sort of public career.

To those who had seen young Auberon in society only, this was almost incomprehensible, for he neither swelled largely, nor did he boast, and with women he was absolutely shy. But the effects of him on his kind were known to Harold, who had watched them often, at school and in the Oxford clubs. He ruled looser minds as do those who have an object in life from its opening, or better still, a progressive interest. This interest was no more nor less than the British Constitution. Quentin came of a race of slightly dogmatic Empire-builders, men framed for government, who fitted the machine elaborated by their fathers as a sword its sheath. Dogmatic in speech, they were romantic in spirit, and most of them had been military. Quentin himself was not,—he left the military 'panache' to others, though he had hankerings after it occasionally, and dropped into his destined place in the constitutional machine upon the civil side. He was a born controller, and developer by the way: only it was systems he must improve, rather than persons. He was ready to leave the little matter of personal development to others,—he even granted women a share in that game. Quentin's game was a bigger one, he was acutely ambitious; but he

betrayed little or nothing of it in his daily life, and only constant companions like Harold discovered or guessed the fact.

His other passion in life was for experiment, for he had an enterprising mind ; but in that he was not socially inclined,—he was careful to involve no other than himself, or occasionally Harold. He was not hampered in his experiments by the fear of failure, since his curiosity easily outweighed his conceit. He was fortunate, too, in having no immediate family to involve, his young sister being already taken in hand by his clever aunt. Quentin was singularly free of feminine claims, and, we fear, revelled in the immunity. One really has not time in life for everything. Women, and what they represented, were not worthless, but they must wait. That was Mr. Auberon's general attitude at twenty-three, when this chronicle makes his acquaintance.

Having thus prejudiced our readers firmly against him, it becomes necessary to introduce him in person, for such introduction, even to the least well-disposed critic, could not do him harm. His appearance and address were those of any well-bred young citizen, and his tastes and habits of the simplest, even in a generation in which simplicity became the mode. Quentin could dine off dry bread and sleep under a haystack with the best of his contemporaries, nor did he do it merely to discover what it was like. He and Harold did a number of queer things in their Oxford vacations, which, when alluded to easily afterwards, produced palpitations in Mrs. Falkland's maternal breast. Yet Mrs. Falkland possessed, by reflection from her son, a certain confidence in the omnipotent and invisible Mr. Auberon, and she did not attempt the thankless task of dividing the pair. She was passive, and only occasionally piteous, on the subject, at the time of which we speak : when Quentin, owing to the new house in Coburg Place, and Captain Falkland's sudden idea, was driven once more to come to close quarters with Harold's family.

Quentin's condition at the time was self-dependent, by his own choice. The kind of effort was not, in his father's circumstances, strictly necessary, but it was to Quentin's ideas, since the next Auberon in order was now reaching an age to be educated, and was shortly to be sent home in his turn. With his eye upon the India Office, as soon as it could be respectably attained, Quentin gave up, in spite of his aunt's protest, the room he had hitherto occupied in her small house at Hampstead, and lived, when he was not at Oxford or with pupils in the country, an extremely modest and retired life of his own in town, 'cramming,' with concentrated ardour, to fit himself for the reduction of the next barrier that stretched across his path.

Fate reached him in this way. Harold, always in his confidence, made the mistake of alluding in a jocular spirit to his hermit's cell in public, at the Falkland lunch-table. Whereupon Captain Falkland aroused, astonishing his world; and proclaiming it aloud to be 'flat nonsense' and 'not to be thought of,' took steps at once for Quentin's relief. With the utmost tact and kindness, and the least elegant phraseology conceivable, he signified in a few lines to Quentin that, during that part of the year when his own town house was open, a couple of rooms in it were at Quentin's entire disposal, for as long as he pleased; and that the Captain would be seriously offended if he did not abandon his lodgings in their favour immediately, *sine die*, and thenceforward.

Quentin, having considered the offer, decided to refuse it, even at the risk of offence to the kind Captain: and called upon the Falklands one morning to explain. He had provided himself with a cogent list of reasons, and was confident that he could present them both clearly and courteously to the ear of his father's old friend, granted he could get a private interview. The aspect of the new house, new servants, and smart furniture on his arrival made him more certain still. The only thing he dreaded was that Mrs. Falkland, whom he remembered sufficiently,

and who would, he guessed, understand nothing of his need for privacy and concentration, should intervene before he could make his position really clear.

As fate or fortune would have it, both the Captain and his wife were out ; and Mr. Auberon was just withdrawing and deciding to explain by post, when he found himself face to face with their daughter, Miss Helena, who had been exercising the dogs in the Park. She met him a few steps from the door, and called instantly to the servant not to shut it, in an easy and decisive tone. Since she had been racing the dogs in the Park, she was flushed, but apart from that, and some slight breathlessness, her composure and straightforwardness were what he remembered. So he let her delay him, and conduct him to her father's study on the ground floor of the mansion, to listen to his case.

It was long since Quentin had seen her, though in his schooldays he had been fairly frequently in her company, when he joined Harold's family for rock-climbing expeditions in Switzerland. She had been a child then, and boy-fashion, Quentin had not greatly regarded her : especially since his thoughts in mountain districts were always bound by the single purpose of scoring peaks. That left no room for sisters : but Harold had alluded to her, from time to time, so Quentin was not quite lacking in information on the subject. Harold and Quentin each had a young sister of whom they were frankly fond : so an occasional comparison of notes led to the establishment of some useful statistical facts as to sisters in general, not to be despised.

Thus Quentin had learnt that Miss Falkland was in training to be a society beauty, and that Harold, privately, thought it rot, but did not tell the poor old Mater so. That Helena had a long-guarded ambition to become an actress, which 'scarified' the Mater so much, that she had taken to having a headache whenever the subject was mentioned. That Harold 'backed' his sister in her

independent ideas, partly in earnest for her own sake, partly in mischief to annoy his mother. That Helena, all told, was quite a sensible girl, who mended your coat for you, walked in all weathers, and gave nearly as good as she got on the tennis-court and in the lists of domestic controversy: unless—a serious exception—she found herself in the neighbourhood of a formless thing called a baby; whereupon she dropped dignity and decorum, and lost all regard for logic, grammar, and good sense, in a flow of words as formless as the thing to which they were addressed. Wherefore Harold preferred not to accompany Helena on her Sunday walks with her father in Kensington Gardens, where babies abound, because the governor stood that sort of exhibition better than he did. Not to mention people looked at Helena quite enough as it was, owing to her peculiar hair.

Quentin remembered Helena's peculiar hair: it was, so to speak, on his notes, since it had swung down her back in a ruddy-tinted rope in the school-days when he had first known her. Now the first point he noted was that the rope was no more: the hair specialists had dispersed it, according to their ideas, in waves and coils about her head. It changed the look of her considerably, one had to get over it: more especially when in the study she cast her hat aside, and the full intricacy of the hair's arrangement became visible. But he soon discovered the girl of fifteen unchanged beneath this crust, or crest, of fashion; and found himself talking to her as naturally as though she had been Harold.

Miss Helena listened with her eyes cast down to his cogent reasons, and seemed to turn them over for a little while before she spoke.

'I will explain to Father,' she then said, looking at Quentin, 'or try to explain. I think I've got it straight. I can't prevent his being disappointed, of course. I shall have to let Harold know he was right.'

'What did Harold say?' asked Quentin.

'Oh, that you would never agree to inhabit a place with such a frivolous atmosphere; because you would never trust us—Mother and me—to let you alone.'

Quentin was slightly disturbed by this counter-attack, and sat forward in his chair. 'Indeed I didn't mean that,' he said hastily. 'I hope you don't imagine——'

'Oh yes, I do,' said Helena, patting her hair to be sure that the dog-race had not deranged it, 'and it's quite natural. I can guess pretty much how you feel, particularly as Harold took a lot of trouble to explain to me. He was kind enough to say that Father did not understand a worker's point of view, but that I might. Because I want dreadfully to do something myself one of these days, only nobody allows me.'

'Yes, I remember,' said Quentin, smiling. 'I hope you have advanced a little since I met you last.' He had been bound, of course, even in the old days, to come across Helena's acting-mania. It was a vexed subject, and never remained in abeyance very long.

'Very little,' said Helena, and shook her gleaming head. 'There are times when I all but despair. But I still continue to work like a mole beneath the surface, and just lately Father has shown signs of crumbling. Clear signs. Wouldn't it be thrilling if he did?' She threw this at Quentin suddenly.

'After all these years,' he answered gravely. 'It would indeed.'

He looked at Helena's pensive face a moment. She had got her breath by now, and the temporary flush had faded. She had not much colour by nature, but she looked healthy and vigorous, and knew how to sit still. Quentin wished suddenly that his own sister could learn to sit like that, without twisting herself into all kinds of shapes and angles. It made a much pleasanter presence in the room.

'Miss Falkland, did you have an argument with Harold?' he asked, 'about my coming? I mean, did you take a side?'

'Of course,' said Helena. 'I backed Father. I have to back him against Harold, they're so unfairly matched. You see, Father produced the plan at lunch, one of his topping ideas. He is always having them. And I can't bear Harold to snub him, at any rate quite at once. I know he has been wanting to do something for Colonel Auberon for years, and he thought he had at last found a way. So when Harold said he would never get you to come here, I said he would,—according to my recollection. I couldn't go on anything stronger than that.'

'Did you—er—risk anything but your credit for remembrance?' asked Quentin, with proper caution.

'How well you know Harold!' said Helena, looking at him again. 'Of course when he proposed a shilling, I accepted it. Once started, you can't go back, and Father was depending on me. I think Mother thought it rather shocking of me to bet.' She sighed. 'Mother always thinks, when Harold and I discuss the least thing across the table, we are quarrelling. Because we sit just opposite, you know. Perhaps we did talk a little fast.'

'Rather hard lines if you mayn't argue with Harold,' said Quentin.

'I'm getting too old for it,' said Helena, patting her hair again. Her care for its construction suggested that it had only attained that eminence recently. 'I am too old for most things now. However, I pacified Mother. I told her I was simply in honour bound to back Father: and I promised her it was the last bet I should ever make.'

'I am sorry to be the cause of your losing it,' said Quentin. 'I had no idea it would be such a historic occasion.'

'I'm sorry too,' said Helena, and there was silence. 'You see, quite apart from the shilling, I hoped you would come. I have terribly hard work with Harold at dinner sometimes,—especially when he lifts one eyebrow, and overlooks my inaccuracies. You never did that.' She threw this at him suddenly again.

'Didn't I?' said Quentin, disturbed. He tried to remember what kind of a prig he had been at seventeen.

'Hardly ever,' said Helena, looking out of the window. 'In private, of course, I can deal with Harold: but in public, with Mother hushing me at every turn, I can't.'

There was another pause.

'It's frightfully good of Captain Falkland,' said Quentin doubtfully.

'I had a difference with Mother too about the rooms,' said Helena. 'You have let me in for a lot of quarrelling.'

'What rooms?'

'Yours, if you came. This house is so ridiculously larger than we want. Would you mind coming to look at them?'

'What's the point?' said Quentin.

'Only I might still be right about the ones you would have liked best, if you had accepted Father. Mightn't I? It would be some consolation.'

'For the loss of the shilling?'

'Yes.'

Needless to say, having been thus cunningly induced to see the careful preparations made in his honour,—or rather his father's honour,—in the Falkland house, Quentin gave in. Helena had a delightful time at dinner that night, informing Harold. She let him off nothing of her triumph. She would not let him forget the shilling either, though he was preparing to overlook such a detail. Mrs. Falkland was rather fussed at Helena having shown Mr. Auberon his private rooms in her absence, and having talked to him so freely, discussing the length of his bed, the merits of hot and cold baths, and so forth: it was the kind of thing Helena did without reflection. She seemed incapable of certain lines of reflection at all, and was terribly impulsive. At this transition period Helena might be said to take all her mother's time; but Mrs. Falkland was chivying her into the narrow road of propriety, by degrees; and had every reason to hope she would do her credit, when she

emerged, complete and radiant, from the shadow of the schoolroom.

II

Miss Helena Falkland had not been long before the world's eye, the following winter, when the world learnt that her mother was in difficulties about her. Considering her attractions, this was not surprising, but the difficulty, when arrived at, did not prove to be of the kind they thought.

Helena, it seemed, had the Falkland fault of tenacity, only her mother called it obstinacy. She had had the idea first at twelve years old, and never turned ; she had slowly, very slowly, carried all before her. First, her elocution teacher succumbed, a haughty lady, who yet admitted Helena 'had a gift.' All her band of school friends were in her pocket, naturally : indeed most of them had had dreams of becoming great actresses too. Her brother Harold, who really ought to have known better, encouraged her absurd ideas. Harold's friend Mr. Auberon (who had such an influence with dear Helena) kept a tiresomely open mind, and steered a middle course, taking refuge behind Harold when necessary. Now her father, lured by these various young men, and by the coaxing of his favourite daughter, was wavering. Captain Falkland 'didn't see why the girl shouldn't have a shot, if her heart was set on it,'—and thus was Mrs. Falkland herself let in. . . . 'And *look* at her,' said Mrs. Falkland.

Her confidantes looked, not unwillingly. Helena had entered upon her first London season to become, almost instantly, a success,—what our grandfathers would have called a toast. She was admitted handsome, beautiful at her best : young girls, of course, are changeable. She was popular, by a means known to herself, without being the least original, audacious, or noisy. Everybody liked her on sight, smiled, made room for her, listened to what she

said, introduced her to their eldest sons, and regretted it afterwards. Not that she was ill-dowered,—she would have a nice little fortune through the mother, and her origin on the father's side was respectable. She might do quite good things in time,—so said the wiseacres who watch the seasons change.

Mrs. Falkland did not repeat all this, but a few hints and allusions were enough to recall it to the minds of her rivals, the other mammas. These ladies, who all had daughters more or less 'obstinate,' shook their heads over what Miss Falkland looked, was, and might have been.

After that, accepting her strange prepossession, they discussed ways and means to its realisation, and all, in varying degrees, betrayed their ignorance. The great thing, they agreed with Mrs. Falkland, was to let the girl have a trial in a manner that was public, without being too public, if you understood: something fairly expert, and thoroughly refined,—the ideal, in short, for our talented daughters. To arrive at the ideal, one had to get hold of the 'people who knew.' To catch the people who knew by their coat-tails, or their skirt-tails, if it should so happen, was the problem.

It was on the occasion of one of these drawing-room councils, called in Helena's absence, for her good, that Captain Falkland had an idea. This, as we have mentioned, happened to him now and then, generally after rather a heavy silence. He and Lesbia had assisted at the council, in silence, from the hearthrug, for a good half-hour, before he astonished the room.

'There's Ursula Thynne,' said the Captain. 'The eldest of Joe Thynne's brood,—the General. She married someone in that class, if I remember right. There was a mighty fuss, I know, before she settled.'

'What is the use of vague statements like that, Howard?' complained his wife.

'That's all right, Falkland,' said another superfluous man, coming to life in a modest corner. 'That's quite a

good spot, if I may say so. Miss Thynne married young Ingestre, the younger John. And he's right in the know, if anyone is,—he knows the Mitchells, certainly. I've seen Monty Mitchell with him, at the club.'

The council of matrons stared amazed. To think that this Daniel had been sitting among them, neglected, all this time! Montagu Mitchell was an actor-manager, a name known to all: it was the first time any of the lines of operation suggested had ended in a professional name. Mrs. Falkland, however, still looked sceptical over the tea-tray.

'It might do, if we could get at 'em,' said the Captain, less certainly than before, and glancing at his wife. 'Do you feel inclined to present us, Sykes?'

The superfluous man considered. 'Doubt if I can,' he admitted. 'It would have to be round-about, anyhow. If you want a straight tip, get at young Ingestre through the women. Plenty to choose from,' he added pensively. 'That's his kind.'

'I must have links with the Thynnes,' said the good Captain later, pondering this 'straight tip' to assist his wife. 'The Aubérons, now,—they and the Thynnes were hand in glove,—their estates in Devonshire touched, I remember. Why not work the Auberon boy, Kathie? He'd link you on to Ursula, just try him. Quite likely his people have already made him call.'

Mrs. Falkland still looked sceptical, and failed to encourage him at any point. All very well his talking like that, she said, but the Ingestres were the hardest people in London to know, anyone would tell him. That Thynne girl would have grown above herself and them, long before this, if she had accomplished such a connection. Finally, the Captain and Lesbia retired in depression, leaving the Captain's wife determined to follow his advice to the letter, and with the least delay. His last idea was the happiest of all. That Mr. Auberon's family had been neighbours and intimates of Mrs. Ingestre's, was the kind

of invaluable fact that might have languished for ever in obscurity, but for this lucky chance. That, with the other excuse in hand of Helena's acting ambition, might at length hoist Mrs. Falkland onto a long coveted social platform.

She was not purely selfish in her scheming, it must be explained: she wanted interest for her son Harold. Harold, his mother was convinced, was a person of great though quiet talents in the diplomatic line. He was a born diplomatist,—she had even marked it in the nursery. Since those early days, he had never failed to get what he wanted with as few words as possible; and could effect more in controversy by the lift of an eyebrow, and a thumb thrust carelessly into his button-hole, than others by weeks of the wittiest argument. Now, money was not lacking towards Harold's future,—Mrs. Falkland had heaps: talent was not lacking, obviously—even Mr. Auberon respected his attainments: style was not lacking—Harold's style was unique. Only interest was lacking, and that must be made for him, by his mother's tireless effort. The Ingestres,—who really were unspeakably high up, and far back, and well within, and right at the back of, and so forth,—were the very people to help her. They were the kind of family whose word has weight in high places,—they were also the kind of family on whom minds like Mrs. Falkland's love to dwell, even if they dwell for ever at a distance. Now, though she would still have preferred to know the parents, it was obviously better than nothing to know the son. So Mrs. Falkland went to work *con amore*, and spread the usual nets abroad to ensnare Ursula Thynne, who had married the Ingestres' heir, and consequently must sooner or later become a central figure among them. Military society is sure to hang together by innumerable threads if one takes the trouble to find them: and before Helena's first London season had been long under way, Mrs. Falkland had triumphantly 'cornered' young Mrs. Ingestre, planted an adroit hint, and been politely asked to tea.

But luck was against Mrs. Falkland in these cautious schemes for her children's good. The young in these days never know how to be managed, however great may be their elders' talent for managing them. Helena herself, reckless of either peril or advantage that might accrue to her from the proceeding, danced with Mr. Johnny Ingestre in person, at a ball where her mother was supposed to be protecting her, without her mother's knowledge. This fashion of flying straight at the mark, while her mother was going nicely round about to it, was disturbing to her mother's ideas: and since it was just the kind of thing Helena was always doing, it made her fretful.

'You have no business to get introductions without telling me,' she said. 'The man might be quite unsuitable, you can't know.'

'But I couldn't refuse to dance with him, could I?' said Helena.

'It all depends,' said her mother. 'What is he like?'

'Tall,' said Helena, 'and dark, with drooping eyes that open at you rather suddenly when you speak. And he dances quite divinely.'

'Were you introduced to his wife?' said Mrs. Falkland, having digested this personal description.

'His wife?' said Helena. 'No. I shouldn't have thought he had one.'

Mrs. Falkland considered this again, looking rather hard at Helena. She did not think she flirted, but with one's own daughter, it is so hard to know.

'Who introduced *you*?' she demanded.

'Mrs. Shovell,' said Helena. 'I asked her to.'

'You *asked*?'

'I get so tired of dancing with people smaller than myself,' explained Helena, 'and having to do all the work. With a man like Mr. Ingestre, you can really let yourself go. It's glorious.'

'Who?' said Mrs. Falkland, having digested this in turn, 'is Mrs. Shovell?'

'Oh, Mother dear, how you forget people,' said Helena. 'She's the girl the Weyburns call Violet, who was with them at that concert at Regent's Hall. Dark, with white fur.' She waited. 'Oh, you can't have forgotten. She read the programme to the awful old lady, the deaf one who sits in the front row.' She waited again. 'Oh, Mother dear! The girl you called conceited, and said she contradicted you. She really only agreed with Harold when he did,' added Helena, 'but she does things rather decidedly, so you minded.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Falkland, recollecting her own strictures at once, and the object of them by the way. 'Yes, indeed!'

'Harold hasn't forgotten,' said Helena.

'She's about the only female of sense I ever talked to,' said Harold unexpectedly, from where he appeared to be deep in a yellow-backed novel. Mrs. Falkland gasped, but since it was Harold, submitted. The new generation, in the person of Harold, was too much for Mrs. Falkland. Helena she still could manage more or less.

'I wish you would not pick up all sorts of people, Helena,' she said, 'without consulting me. I didn't care for that girl's manners at all, and if the Weyburns do bring her to one concert, there's no necessity to know her again.'

'But I'm always meeting her,' said Helena. 'I can't think how you have missed her, Mother, really, for she goes to all the dances. And you can't keep on smiling and saying nothing, especially when you tidy your hair at the same glass.'

'Oh, that's what happened, is it?'

'Yes. So I just mentioned she had the loveliest chain I had ever seen: and she said she was thinking the same about my hair: so next time I saw her, I sat down by her on purpose, naturally.'

'Naturally, since she flattered you. Well?'

'Well, we talked about people, as you do; and I noticed she called Mr. Ingestre by his Christian name.'

'Oh, does she?' said Mrs. Falkland.

'Most people seem to,' said Helena. 'He's that kind of man. So I said I wished she'd introduce me,—joking, you know. But presently when we were talking about other quite serious things, he came up behind her. So she asked him if he had a dance left,—and then she asked me if I had one,—carelessly. She did it beautifully, he couldn't have guessed. So there we were, that's all.'

'She had no business to do it,' said Mrs. Falkland. 'And you ought to come to me when you are not dancing, you know that.'

'I know they do in books—like *Persuasion* and *Evelina*,' said Helena, biting her lip. 'I didn't happen to see you, Mother dear. And Mrs. Shovell is married, though she doesn't look it.'

Mrs. Falkland pondered, and glanced at Harold. Harold was deep in his book

'I gather, dear,' she said, 'that Mr. Ingestre is a man you have to be rather careful with.'

'I'm sure he is,' said Helena. Being entreated to explain—'Well, he's a perfectly terrible flirt, anyone can see. That's why I was rather surprised when you said just now he was married.'

This betrayed such innocence, in combination with its surprising ease, that Mrs. Falkland felt inclined to drop the subject altogether. She would have been better advised to do so.

'Did he try to flirt with you?' she said.

'Well, just at the end, he began to,' said Helena. 'He was bored to begin with, and rather cross.'

'Cross, was he? Why?'

'Mother dear, how can I tell? I had an idea he really wanted Mrs. Shovell for that dance; and she dodged, and substituted me.'

'What made you think that?'

'Something in his tone when he asked if he might have the pleasure; and the way he looked at her across me, when we were sitting out.'

'So you played second fiddle to that girl, did you?' said Mrs. Falkland, who was, as need not be said, immensely proud of Helena.

'He was quite polite,' said Helena, 'but tired. Older than I thought,—I began to be sorry I had ventured. Rather grand,—he drooped his eyes and said the proper things. When I'm nervous, you know, I'm silly. I expect he thought me a fair idiot. Anyhow I am, compared with her.'

'You are,' said Harold.

'Don't startle one so, Harold,' said Mrs. Falkland sharply. 'Your sister is not an idiot, she has sense enough to know better.' She resumed mildness. 'I am glad, my dear, Mr. Ingestre said *proper* things, at least to start with, May I hear how he concluded?'

'Mother dear, I really can't!' Helena laughed again. 'Two in the morning, you know. You must make allowances.'

'I do not,' said Mrs. Falkland. 'A married man! Did you encourage him?'

The girl blushed for the first time: with pure indignation, but her mother thought, with shame.

'Do let her alone, Mother,' said Harold. There was a pause.

'I didn't know he was married then,' said Helena, her young chin rather high. 'Mrs. Shovell had not mentioned it, and men don't wear wedding-rings. I turned extremely stiff, when he began to do it, and as unpleasant as I dared. He is a slightly—what shall I say?—imposing person, even when he talks nonsense. I don't know how he manages the two things, I'm sure.'

'Is he good-looking?' said the unwise parent.

'I hardly know,' said Helena, suddenly calm. 'I hardly looked at him. You don't while you are dancing: and after, it was dark.'

Mrs. Falkland had sent Helena only to the 'very nicest' schools, which is as much as to say that the girl had been

hedged, in so far as was possible, into the ideals of the last generation, not her own. Helena was really, had her mother been able to divine it, a triumph over these highly unnatural conditions, owing to a fortunate natural balance within her of high spirit and good sense. It might have relieved Mrs. Falkland to know that Helena had snubbed the conquering Mr. Ingestre, towards the close of that dance interval, with a quiet competence some older women would have envied her: not at all aggressively,—simply by making her genuine innocence and dignity apparent in every gentle answer she gave him; with the result first, that she caught John's whole attention, which he had not even granted her before: and subsequently that he liked, respected, and remembered her.

Helena was making this same impression, that of innocent dignity, broadcast during her first London season. By the effect it produced, one might guess it to be rather an unusual combination. The dignity was physical partly, for Helena was tall, but it went deeper than externals. She had an air, not only outwardly, of looking over people's heads: the least trifle abstracted, though so cordial and kind. Helena was, to her own mind, 'very selfish,' nursing her secret ambition constantly, and looking beyond the occupations and amusements her kind friends provided for her. Dreams of fame visited Helena, during nights when her young limbs, tired with dancing, lay at ease. She saw herself moving multitudes, among flowers, on a lofty and brilliantly lighted stage. She felt strong in herself the power for such emotion, the need to express it greatly before the world. She read and studied with secret ardour, and turned every little incident that occurred in her outer life daily, to account in the service of her fixed idea. It was her joy and her torment, as all such obsessions are; it meant more to her, she trembled to confess, than her religion. She believed it was the great secret to which life was bearing her—or half believed it. At rare moments only, she had doubts. She tried not to

talk of it, to advertise all kinds of other interests before an indifferent and frivolous world ; but the least show of real sympathy with her dear dream was apt to unlock the torrent of her confidence suddenly.

This was what had occurred, on the night of that dance she described to her mother. Helena had got well ahead, further than Mrs. Falkland guessed, in schemes for her own advancement, that most interesting evening, owing to the pleasant impulsiveness of youth in following up an acquaintance that strikes them as useful and agreeable. That was how young Mrs. Shovell struck Helena, promptly. Compared with the elaborate methods of Mrs. Falkland and her friends, Miss Falkland's were of an attractive simplicity. She looked at Violet, two or three times, and determined she was ' nice.' She resolved to love her after about ten minutes' acquaintance. After about ten minutes more of testing her general utility, she determined to grasp and use her as a stepping-stone to her heart's desire. The way was plain, since Mrs. Shovell knew crowds of clever and thrilling people, and could—obviously to Helena—get what she liked out of any of them, being so pretty and so profoundly experienced. (Violet had been married four years.) Miss Falkland was gentle and had charming manners : but her general attitude was—' Kindly do this for me at once, since you can,'—so of course Mrs. Shovell laughed, and submitted to the necessity.

It seemed, she saw several possible ways open to Helena's heart's desire, ' if Helena's mother cared.' Helena thereupon conveyed that her father ' cared ' more than her mother, unfortunately,—her mother was merely recoiling backward before the inevitable. Things at home were very difficult, and Helena was, of course, oppressed. She did not, however, it suddenly came to light, despair of getting round Mother.

Violet suggested she should accomplish this process before they went any further in concert. In the meantime, she would ' sound ' John Ingestre, and other knowledge-

able persons of her acquaintance. Helena gazed at her, overawed by the coincidence, but not surprised. It was only another flash of the Providence that guided her. All things in her world worked together for good. Of course, she had already had the idea that young Mr. Ingestre was a person of power as well as of charm. The way he 'drooped his eyes' alone suggested it, not to mention his 'imposing' manner of talking nonsense. To be reassured, in her first instinct towards him, by a common friend, who called him familiarly by his first name, was delightful.

Helena went home to blissful dreams that night ; and before she slept to an innocent train of reverie, known to girlhood, half glowing memory, half moonlight conjecture : unhampered by a backward thought, since men 'do not wear wedding-rings,' and she had not then guessed he was married.

III

Mrs. Falkland was one of the excellent people who, while being extremely sure of their own opinion, seem born to be deluded.

'Oh, dear no, boy and girl merely,' was Mrs. Falkland's classical answer, when approached with leading questions on the subject of her daughter and Mr. Auberon, of the India Office. But she said it with a certain manner, and a certain smile, that would have outraged both young people, had they known : and her usual addition, that Quentin was 'such a dear boy,' would not have improved matters.

The fact was, that Mrs. Falkland began to see in Quentin, not only a rising man with a notable father,—Colonel Auberon was gazetted Major-General that year,—but a real resource, a very present help in the troublous tussle with her daughter. His remarks in response to her periodic fusses over Helena were always sensible, though brief. He certainly listened to her, which Harold, as a

rule, did not. He did not, like Harold, and her husband very frequently, say Helena was all right, and read the paper. He took in Helena's case, or seemed to, with a far-reaching look in his eyes that was flattering, and often made an agreeable remark. Beyond that, he had a way of remembering what she told him, and sometimes,—rather disconcertingly,—quoted her own words to herself. Altogether, Mrs. Falkland thought him a dear boy, refused entirely to let him leave her roof, and insisted on weaving all about him her maternal hopes, as she thought in secret. Mrs. Falkland could, as a fact, keep nothing secret long.

Quentin, who was genuinely grateful to her, bore her little follies patiently, as a rule ; but she was rather harder to bear than usual, the day she inveigled him into paying the call upon young Mrs. Ingestre. Owing to Harold and Helena, persistently on his side, he did not often have to suffer her interference ; but Harold and Helena were out riding that afternoon, and so Quentin fell into her hands. Quentin's parents had been friends of Ursula's, so the Captain had informed her : and besides, she liked showing him off.

'They are fashionable people,' said Mrs. Falkland of the Ingestres, 'and artistic. I hear they go in for art and the drama, particularly that. I have an idea Mrs. Ingestre may be helpful about dear Helena, and give us some sound advice. They are at least sure to have first-hand knowledge of Stage-land, as to which I admit my ignorance.' She smiled benevolently.

'I see,' said Quentin. 'It's a pity Miss Falkland can't go instead of me, isn't it ? I really know nothing of the lady. Of course I've heard of General Thynne,' he proceeded, fearing he had been uncivil. 'My father and uncles had a feud with the Thynnes, once, and besieged their barn. But this Miss Thynne wasn't in existence then, any more than I was. The feuds of our parents are nothing to us, not blood-feuds, are they ?'

'It makes something to talk about,' said Mrs. Falkland

cheerfully. 'I consider it kind of you to come with me, Quentin, since it may, you see, help dear Helena.'

Quentin was silent, overborne. He had no means of dealing with remarks of that sort that was both polite and politic, so he let them alone. He would sooner have had things straight with her, as to the plain and pleasant terms of comradeship he enjoyed, and hoped to enjoy, with Miss Falkland : but if Falkland did not see fit to straighten his mother's mind on the subject, he could not do so.

Mrs. Falkland's laborious generalship, however, in a losing cause, amused him as spectator : for, like Harold, he 'backed' Miss Falkland to get what she wanted with no generalship at all ; and he found more entertainment, during the diplomatic visit to young Mrs. Ingestre, than he had expected. Quentin had often heard of the strategy spent in storming a social citadel, but he had never studied its methods in operation. Marvellous and mysterious, it seemed to him. Half the time he wondered what the ladies were at, and what could be the good of it. Mrs. Falkland was plainly eager to dig out facts about Mrs. Ingestre ; but then as Mrs. Ingestre was far from eager to dig out facts about Mrs. Falkland, and reticent about her own, nobody got very far. He himself was of little or no use in the main issue, though he played the siege of Mrs. Ingestre's family barn for what it was worth during the preliminaries ; but he looked on at every stage of the contest with intelligent interest, so we may be safe in giving his view.

It was clear to him from the first that, whatever it was that Mrs. Falkland really wanted, she was outmatched by her younger opponent. There was that in Mrs. Ingestre's appearance, for all its elegant restraint, that implied she would put up a good fight in defence of any citadel of which she had been elected châtelaine. She was a tall, fair, tired-looking girl of something over thirty, most correctly gowned and mannered,—a type that is called pretty by three-fourths of mankind, and smart by the

remaining quarter. Her house, or at least such part of it as she exhibited, was correct as well. Her husband's quarters were not so, but Ursula did not exhibit them. Mrs. Falkland's leading questions on the domestic tack led to no fruition, and if young family existed, it was certainly well in hand. So were the servants, for the quiet of the dark London house was profound. In the quiet Mrs. Ingestre's sharp-edged, rather toneless voice worried Quentin, and he found himself treading with circumspection in the least thing he said. This is a healthy boy's tribute to nerves, invariably.

His first, or romantic, theory of her was that the 'fashionable' Ingestre family despised and trampled the heir's young wife: but that would not do. He had to revise it when it came to light that the flowers, the silver, the tapestry, the paintings, almost every beautiful object in the room, had come by way of 'John's people,'—John's father, or his mother still more commonly. This looked as though she were well treated by them, or even spoiled. Yet Ursula did not boast of their favour: she seemed if anything impatient of it,—restive. She held Mrs. Falkland's too evident curiosity on the subject at bay with great determination and real dignity, her manner remaining a model of politeness the whole time.

'Old Mrs. Ingestre is a great invalid, I believe,' said Mrs. Falkland, who seemed to have armed herself with information.

'John's mother is,' said Ursula. 'There is an older Mrs. Ingestre still, you know. His grandmother lives with them now.'

'You don't say so,—quite patriarchal,' said Mrs. Falkland.

'Yes,' said Ursula, with a faint smile. 'John, and his father, and his grandmother, are always fighting. Two of them fight, that is: the other takes a side.'

Quentin laughed, and Mrs. Falkland said—'Then you have to be peace-maker, I suppose.'

'Oh dear no,' said Ursula. 'I leave that to my mother-in-law, she's used to it. Besides, it amuses them,' she added languidly.

'Your husband is very busy, I suppose,' said Mrs. Falkland presently, taking the field.

'John busy? Oh, I don't know. In town, he hasn't much to do. He goes about a good deal, of course,' she added, setting her lips nervously as she made the tea, 'and rides as much as he can, and goes to concerts, and his club.'

'My daughter had the pleasure of meeting him,' said Mrs. Falkland.

'Really?' said Ursula.

'Only a dance, and some time since. Mr. Ingestre has probably forgotten.'

'There are such dozens of dances, aren't there?' said Ursula. There ensued a pause,—for cream and cake, and so forth, such as occurs in these campaigns.

'We are in difficulties about dear Helena,' Mrs. Falkland resumed, 'and people keep assuring us that Mr. Ingestre is just the person we need to help us.'

'John is?' Up went Ursula's eyebrows. 'I'm sure he would be very glad——' She stopped short with a slight laugh. 'Excuse me, I was trying to think of any way in which John could be useful. I'm unable to guess.'

'Isn't he deep in with all sorts of wonderful people in Stage-land?' said Mrs. Falkland, playful too.

'Stage? Oh, I hardly know. I dare say.' This was damping.

'Helena thinks she can act, you know. We thought that possibly——'

'Lots of girls think they can act, don't they?' said Ursula.

This was more damping still. Mrs. Falkland boasted of her daughter's proficiency a little, and repeated compliments that had been paid her, but with slight effect. Mrs. Ingestre was politely interested, that was all. Mrs. Falkland began privately to accuse that stupid Mr. Sykes

of exaggerating Johnny's influence,—his wife thought nothing of it, evidently. Quentin, feeling he must make one effort, in decency, picked up the standard as she dropped it. He made a general observation, and alluded aptly to the actor-manager Mitchell.

'Oh, he's a horrid man,' said Ursula at once. 'I shouldn't have anything to do with him.'

'Horrid? In what sense?'

'Oh, rude and vulgar and pretentious: the worst sort.'

'Wasn't he mentioned for a knighthood?' said Mrs. Falkland.

'Money,' said Ursula simply. Nor, beyond this, would she gossip, though she had the air of knowing more than she said.

'His wife?' ventured Quentin. For Mitchell's wife had borne a name of note,—a really mighty name.

'His wife is rather worse,—a clever actress, of course,' she admitted mechanically. 'Did you ever see her Hermione?—wonderful. . . . I hope your father kept clear of the plague area, Mr. Auberon. I can't remember if it touched his district. I've two or three uncles out there, so I ought to know; but I'm afraid I neglect my correspondence nowadays, and I've lost my Indian geography.'

If she wished to indicate that she kept clear of the plague area of her husband's acquaintance, she certainly succeeded. Quentin could not admire her as much as Mrs. Falkland; he had an idea a wife should back her husband up. Ursula was giving him away at every word, more by tone and manner than by anything definitely said.

'I expect you're busy,' he said, in the usual formula, dropping Helena's quest in turn. It seemed hopeless, really, with the front she offered of perfectly courteous unconcern.

'Oh, I haven't really much to do,' she answered instantly. 'At any rate, I have heaps of time.' Quentin's business instinct approved the answer. It was rare, he knew, for the really useless people so to plead. They plead as a

rule the contrary, that they are 'so busy, no time at all.' He wondered at once what her real interests were, and discovered later, through his aunt, that she was an active charitable organiser.

'Do you play?' he suggested, his eyes roving towards the piano.

'I play a little,' she said, glancing that way too. 'Used to, that is, at home. My husband's got a better piano in his room. All his family go in for music,—I don't pretend to, much. I hear as much as I can, of course, one loses ground so, if one doesn't. Especially nowadays,—these new men do such surprising things. . . . Do you care for music?' she added, after just the right interval.

She had the manner of bringing the talk back to the conventional impersonal line, with relief. Any observer of experience would have guessed by that alone she could not be a happy woman,—the impression reached Quentin vaguely. Mrs. Falkland seemed wholly impervious to such hints of sensitiveness in her hostess, and pursued her with relentless enquiry to the close. Towards the end of their allotted time, it struck Quentin with something of a shock that she was probing, or prying, deliberately, and he scented her danger in Mrs. Ingestre's aspect, though her tone remained unchangingly tired and cool.

They were on the subject of common acquaintance, which was no harm in itself, only Mrs. Falkland talked of young women exclusively. Quentin knew most of those she mentioned merely as names, having heard Helena and Harold use them. Since he was thus entirely out of it, and Mrs. Ingestre increasingly bored, as was evident, by the subject, he rather wondered Mrs. Falkland should press it as she did. There was the elder Miss Weyburn, for instance, one of the prettiest of the season's débutantes, said to be 'so amusing.'

'Yes, I suppose she's amusing,' said Ursula. 'John seems to think so,—he says there's nothing she won't say if she's put to it. But there you are. These new girls

score by saying just what most people stop short of, don't they? And, of course, if they are as handsome as Barbara, it's called original.'

'That's meant for you, Quentin,' said Mrs. Falkland playfully.

'Oh,' said Ursula, with a slight smile, and throwing a glance in the same direction, 'but Miss Falkland is not that kind, I'm sure.'

Quentin waited, naturally, for Mrs. Falkland to correct the insinuation conveyed in this; but Mrs. Falkland merely smiled maternally,—just like her,—and proceeded. She proceeded to Mrs. Shovell, another name he knew, simply from its repetition at the Falkland dining-table.

'Oh yes, I know Violet,' said Ursula. 'She's a kind of connection of John's, didn't you know? They're a most confusing family,—second cousin I suppose she is, since her mother's name was the same as his.'

'Not been long married, has she?' said Mrs. Falkland. 'Has she children?'

'One,' said Ursula, looking at her rings.

'A boy?' said Mrs. Falkland.

'Not a boy,' said Ursula.

'She's very artistic, I understand,' said Mrs. Falkland.

'She plays well,' said Ursula, glancing once at Quentin.

'She's managed to keep it up. Dresses rather well too. Do you think her pretty?'

'No,' said Mrs. Falkland. 'Effective perhaps in her way, but nothing pretty about her.'

'You won't find everybody agree with you,' said Ursula. 'John, for instance,—good thing he's not here. He'd make you take that back, fight over every feature in turn. He loves that sort of discussion,—dissection—' her lips met in her nervous, rather haughty fashion,—'but I never see the use. Tastes differ, don't they? It's no use arguing about appearances, piecemeal or otherwise. Either you like the whole result, or you don't. And I tell John—you don't need to be an artist to be quite sure.'

'Certainly not,' said Mrs. Falkland warmly.

'I'd sooner know why I like things,' said Quentin, 'and class the general result. Not necessarily define it, you know, you can't always, but class. You remember better if you want to refer to it later on.'

Ursula looked at him. 'Then you'd back John,' she said. 'John goes in for classing too. Men always back one another anyhow, don't they, Mrs. Falkland? And they never look at women the least as we do. I am hardly ever able to agree about a woman with John,—do you find the same with your husband?

Mrs. Falkland was impressed. That was the way to do it, she was certain. She gave Ursula high marks, being so steadily rebuffed by her in the slight impertinence of her latter questions. The girl might be born a Thynne, but she had caught the great manner perfectly. She was well-bred, and ill-used,—neglected, at least,—but she did not complain, nor try to conceal the obvious. She stood on her own deserts, which were evidently considerable, and shamed him,—it was to be hoped. She did not look unhappy,—she looked handsome and quiet, and capable to a degree,—though she did not disturb herself much over the tea-distribution, being far from a fussy kind of girl. Nor did she ring for servants, as Mrs. Falkland in her place would have done, having no doubt servants to spare. But then Quentin was there, and of course she used him, since Quentin's manners were so nice.

Mrs. Falkland was really thankful, in the event, that she had brought him, for as Ursula trumped her social cards, one by one, with languid efficiency, she began to feel, in the matter of resources, rather denuded. But Quentin talked in all the pauses, with that interesting manner of his of knowing far more things than were necessary, and that nice carelessness—secure in any society—of Oxford young men. Mrs. Ingestre could not trump him, nor did she seem to want to. She even asked for information, more than once: and she looked at him

a good deal, especially when they were on the subject of family likenesses : for it seemed she remembered Quentin's father,—Captain Hugh, as she called him,—very well.

Confidence, Mrs. Falkland had no doubt, would come in time,—since she was now determined to make a friend of Ursula. She was old enough to advise the girl, and had fully enough wifely vexations of her own to sympathise. Men with tempers were very trying,—Mrs. Falkland conceived young Mr. Ingestre as having a temper, since he differed so grievously with his father, as his wife confessed. Captain Falkland had a temper too, which he showed at least once a year, when his lumbago was very bad. There was already a point of sympathy. And even in the matter of Helena, though disappointed for dear Helena's sake, of course, Mrs. Falkland could exult in the support Mrs. Ingestre tacitly offered her in her own original attitude : that of condescension to all forms of art, and frank contumely for the actor's.

'She strikes me as a singularly perfect character,' said Mrs. Falkland to her husband, later that evening. 'Perfect, and pathetic too. I can't describe the impression she made upon me. She is flippant and amusing on the surface, like so many of these smart girls, but I have a feeling of depths beneath. She could be beautifully serious. As for style, she is what I call queenly. I should think she is a rock of strength, quiet strength, and one day her husband will need to turn to her. . . . Quentin agrees with me,' she added.

Quentin started rather, but did not deny it : though, if pressed, he would have drawn a distinction. Strength is a big word, too big to be misused. It was not so much strength he had felt in Ursula as passive resistance, the resistance of a rock stiffly wedged against the teasing of the waves. She lacked life for any forcible proceeding, he thought, and she lacked readiness to be prompt or adroit in the change of a line of action. The true campaigning spirit of her fathers, in short, was not in her.

Stupid she was not, but he privately called her 'dense,' nor did he trouble to define the term. Helena came up in his mind as a contrast,—that was all.

IV

'John,' said Violet, 'will you do me a favour?'

'For a consideration,' said Johnny.

'Oh, do be nice! Will you come and see me on Sunday afternoon?'

Johnny considered. 'Ursula goes to church on Sunday afternoon,' he observed. 'And I go to sleep. We're engaged.'

'I don't want Ursula,' said Violet.

'Oh, I say!' protested Johnny. 'Then I really couldn't——' A pause, while he strolled up the room. 'Will Shovell be there?'

'Of course. All of us. What do you expect?'

Johnny considered the 'all.' He looked at Violet, who had coloured slightly. 'I can do without most of you,' he carefully explained, and departed down the room again.

He was being as 'tiresome' as he knew how, this evening: and Mrs. Shovell had almost abandoned Helena's cause, perforce, to defend herself. This was Johnny's aim: or rather, his aim was that Violet should completely abandon any ulterior cause she might have in mind, in order to attend to him. He happened to be greatly in need of consolation, Violet's by choice, and she kept trying to head him off onto other subjects. It was unwise of her.

'There's Miss Falkland——' said Violet.

'Who's that?' asked Johnny.

'Oh, John!—you danced with her. I introduced you. Ever so nice.'

John appeared to turn over the complete list of his acquaintance, for years past, before he arrived at a solution.

'The little, rough-haired Miss Falkland?' he then asked.

'Well, nobody but you would call her little,' said Violet. 'And her hair is beautiful, simply.' She waited. 'And I thought she danced nicely,' she proceeded, with less decision,—it was rash to make assertions on this point. However, John did not instantly contradict her.

'She's going on the stage,' he said. 'Thinks she is. Ursula told me.'

'Is she? Oh, but you could help her, then.'

'Suppose I could if I wanted. She'll never do much.'

'Why not?' asked Violet mildly.

'Oh, she's nothing but a rough-haired little—common girl.'

'John!'

'Same as all the rest,' concluded Johnny. 'I'm sick of girls,—too many of them.' He walked right away to the extreme corner of the room.

Violet was silent, conscious that she was getting nowhere. It was possible she should not have attempted it, except that she saw him so seldom now. She leant back, and set her hair straight after the hurricane it had recently suffered in the ballroom, waiting his good pleasure to be 'nice' again. He and she were engaged in 'sitting out,'—or rather, she was sitting; nothing so far would induce John. He was in the kind of mood when merely to sit down made him feel as though he were being entrapped or tricked into some abandonment of his rights to roam at large.

Violet had married four years previously, without consulting Johnny,—however, he approved. He liked girls of her class to be married, it gave them a chance, and kept them in order; there is a certain danger in clever girls loose about the world. She had grown up pretty too, as Mrs. Clewer prophesied, and what was more important to Johnny's family, she was a success. The Ingestres had all had a good idea, in youth, that she might become one,—the way Markham took to her in itself was promising; and the good idea and sporting prophecy came to light in

their remarks to one another after the event. The Ingestres linked themselves to success on instinct, it was part of their genius to do so ; so they took note of Violet, and looked after her, whenever her husband and her father gave them a chance.

This chance did not occur so often as Johnny could have wished, especially as drawbacks existed on his own side as well ; however, he got out of that little difficulty by writing to her. He loved writing, as she did. From the age of fourteen, her correspondence with him had never been long intermitted, though it changed its style markedly as time went on. Johnny could not long treat her as a child, troubles on both sides had come too thick and fast. He was one of the few people who had divined her most intimate troubles, and she had repaid him soon after her marriage by divining his. Thus the equal understanding of their allied natures progressed, in spite of all Ursula could do to prevent it,—she grew to hate the sight of Violet's handwriting on an envelope. Better, far, that he should take his chance of meeting the girl in the life than that, she thought, since chances of meeting in London, anyhow, were limited. For that reason among others, Ursula drew her husband to town as frequently as might be from the country he preferred. Johnny did not love it, but for one reason or another, he came.

He had been looking after Violet this evening, duty-bound, and she was rather tired in consequence. Johnny had spotted her turn for his own arts in youth : she was one of the few girls he knew, outside the profession, who could really dance. Consequently he was apt to work her hard, whenever he ran across her on a ballroom floor : it was all to the good, her good, since he instructed her. Violet was rather nice to instruct, light and adroit and quite moderately manageable. It was only her idea of a ballroom as a place to talk sense in, that he rejected, firmly. He liked talking sense himself at certain seasons, but a sitting-out interval was not one of them. Besides,

he did not happen to be in the humour to-night for any earthly person's affairs,—except his own.

She ought to have known this, of course, without his telling her; she should have recognised the fact that she served him simply, for the moment, by existing, not talking at all. It was all he asked of her absolutely, until he happened to want to talk himself.

Violet existed, for the moment, in the deep chair where Johnny had deposited her, when the dancing-lesson was concluded. She had no need to request privacy for her interview, because that was his own taste as well. He required solitude, with something nice to look at, and an atmosphere in which he could spread himself at ease; and what Johnny required, for himself and the girl of the moment, he was enabled to get, even in the most crowded houses. Things and people gave way before him, with all their ancient docility. He found his partner a nice quiet place, and established her in all comfort, reassuring her as to his general approval by the way. Only, having done so, his taste seemed to be to walk round her, and take excursions to the end of the room, and think, instead of sitting affably at her side. This, though really exclusively flattering to Violet, and displaying the friendliest feeling, did not seem to come up to her expectations of a man in her society. She ruled in her young fashion, nowadays, with more than a spark of the Ingestre electric force. Johnny could not put her to bed, figuratively speaking, with the ease he had done at fourteen years old. The little pawn she was had risen to royalty some time since, and when he was in his best moods, in public, Johnny recognised it, and paid tribute with the rest. But not always. In privacy and distraction of mind she was still 'the kid' to him, and he tried to manage her. The result was, an occasional conflict of wills, in which Violet was forced to go under. Johnny regretted it, but it was simply bound to be the case.

'Sit down, John,' she suggested presently.

Johnny did not answer the invitation, nor appear to hear it, remaining motionless, back turned, in a distant corner of the room. The chances of a business consultation with him, on the subject of Miss Falkland's future, did not seem brilliant, certainly. He looked cross, or absent, self-occupied anyhow: something was wrong. What, Violet had very little doubt, but she was not going to talk about it: nor, did she for a moment suppose, would he. He never complained of Ursula to her, or to anybody. He rarely mentioned his wife, except formally, or jesting, as lately: which was why Violet was pretty sure it was growing serious. But his own mother hardly knew more than she did,—John was extraordinarily quiet about his closest concerns. That he was being driven slowly to the limit, by Ursula, she could only guess, knowing them both: the breaking-point, for him, could only be a question of time. For that Ursula would ever budge an inch from her chosen pedestal, was inconceivable.

So she waited for him to come round, as he always might, for though rough and over-riding, his was not a sulky temper. And she watched him the while, with unavoidable appreciation, increased by her own fatigue. Nothing tired Johnny. He was constantly on his feet, when others sat or lounged, he seemed to like the attitude. Indeed, to look at him, one was inclined to admit it is the only posture for which man is suited, he moved with such satisfying ease, and stood—in the best sense of the word—so self-sufficiently. The clever and rather brutal society painter, to whom John had been with the utmost difficulty induced to sit, the year of his marriage, and who had been with the utmost difficulty induced, in return, to look at him, refused on sight to allow him to sit at all: and sent him down to posterity swaggering on his two feet, with a dash and brilliance which 'played the deuce'—so John and his artist explained to everybody—with the Lely and Gainsborough masterpieces already in his father's collection. It was a perpetual satisfaction, that

portrait, to Johnny and his artist, though nobody else admired it the least, and Ursula considered it vulgar. The brutal painter even invited himself to the Hall once, for the sole and avowed purpose of looking at it: needing inspiration from his best work, as it seemed, for the next outrage on society he contemplated. Having his own painting to enjoy, he never looked again at Johnny: but he seemed to have absorbed his nature or essence somehow, not only pictorially: and he remained his friend.

'How's your great-grandfather's great-uncle?' said Violet. After all she was sitting out with him, and somebody must talk.

'He's just run away from his wife,' said Johnny.

She laughed: whereupon he felt a little better, and turned round. The effort had been a lucky one. John had always taken an interest in the archives of his house, and had published, some time since, a highly irreverent memoir of a Jacobean ancestor, which had incensed his father and pleased the critics equally, for it was extremely witty and well done. He was now intermittently engaged on another, and only Violet knew about it. It consoled him to think she knew. He approached, by degrees, and finally came to a stand before her.

'Do you carry a looking-glass?' she asked him, not without mischief. She was still putting finishing touches to her hair.

'Yes,' said Johnny promptly. He put a hand under her chin, and turned her face round to him. 'You've overdone it, if anything,' he informed her. 'I liked it better as it was before.'

'Thanks. Now sit in that other chair, and talk to me.'

Johnny stood where he was, taking notes. 'Beastly cad, aren't I?' he enquired. 'Pulling you about like that in public.'

'You did not,' she said at once, 'half so much as most

men do. I like the way you hold. You only—made use of me, rather cleverly.'

'Made use of you?' He swore. 'You dance divinely.'

'No, John,—just well enough. Don't use bad words, it's true. You were showing off, just now, and if you'd shown me *up*, in so doing, you wouldn't have cared *that*!' She snapped her fingers. 'When I play for you, it's just the same. It always was in the very beginning, wasn't it? If I get through without disgracing you, I ought to be thankful to mercy,—and I am.' She laughed, and invited him again, by a gesture, to the chair at her side.

Johnny did not touch the hand, nor look at it; nor did he smile, he was looking at her eyes. 'Lord, how you understand me,' he muttered. 'What's the *sense* of it, that's what I want to know.'

He seemed on the verge of going off again, and moved a few steps. Then he returned, and flung himself of a sudden into the other chair,—one of those free collapses of his that betrayed a stage training in the background; and exhausted by his warring emotions, buried his head in his arm.

This was a little better, but not much. He was feeling the tyranny of his fate to-night, most terribly. Obviously, Ursula had been worse than usual. His present attitude was of the nature of a broad hint, and any really nice girl, whom he had tacitly admitted to his confidence, should have dropped all idea but that of consoling him, instantly. But Violet persisted in wrong-doing,—she really risked her fate.

'John,' she ventured. 'I'm thirsty. Will you get me something to drink?'

'No,' said Johnny. Not rudely, only abnormally sad.

'Will you be at the next orchestral?'

'No,' said Johnny. 'I'm going to the devil, I mean Devonshire, next Tuesday.'

'Ursula's people?'

'Don't rub it in,' said Johnny. Silence, Violet reviewing her resources.

'Have you a dance with Helena to-night?'

'Helena?'

'The rough-haired Miss Falkland,' said Violet.

'Lord knows,—she may. Come to think of it,' said Johnny, with a sudden happy idea, 'it might be this.'

'John! Liar!' After another interval, comparatively brief, Mrs. Shovell arose. She had had enough of it.

'Where are you going?' snapped Johnny, moving at once.

'Back to the hall,—you reminded me. They must be half-way through. I'd lost the time, owing to our interesting conversation.'

'Well, who wants to talk?' he growled. 'I only want to be near you. No, you don't.'

He caught, with a clever snatch, a floating appendage, sash, or wisp of drapery: the kind that tears easily, and no lady wishes to be torn. It was a simple device, but like all Johnny's devices, effective. Violet wore nice things, as a rule. She stopped short and petitioned.

'John!' she said.

'Who's the man?—out with it.'

'My husband.'

'Thought as much. He can't dance. Sit down.'

'Why?' said Violet. 'You won't do what I want, and you're not amusing me, the least.'

'I'm beastly unhappy,' said Johnny simply, 'so I like you alongside, that's all. I don't want just any kind of girl, when I'm as wretched as I am to-night. You might, I think, have saved me explaining. This thing will tear in a minute,' he added, his eyes running up the streamer he held to her waist, where it was fastened. 'Do look out.'

'You want to lacerate me and my dress as well——'

'I don't want to lacerate you, wouldn't think of it. I want you in that chair. I shan't say anything, probably, for hours——'

'But that's so dull for me. Charles——'

'Charles is amusing and affectionate, isn't he?—Look out, darling, really, you're tearing it.'

'You know my name,' observed Mrs. Shovell, crisp and keen.

He laughed, at his wickedest and laziest. It was getting very much past a joke. He had always teased her, and she was used to it at his hands; but this was teasing very near the line. John had never yet approached the line with her, though she was aware he had done so with others. But now, full-length in his chair, looking at her under his insolently-drooping eyelids, she could not feel so sure. She mastered her own temper as she could.

'Let me go,' she said, as quietly as possible.

'Do as you're told, then,' he returned, touching the chair.

'I must ask you to excuse me,' said Violet. Her tone was cold,—misleading, for in the next flash she rent the cobweb of thin gauze by which he detained her, left it torn in his hand, and started for the door.

'The deuce!' said John, with surprised amusement. He had not expected so bold a step. However, she could not possibly escape him, after so audacious a proceeding,—likely! Before she reached the door his strong arm was about her, pinioning both hers to her side.

'That's the other way,' he informed her. 'How do you like it?'

'Not at all.' The indignant colour flooded her, quite beyond her control.

'I thought not. . . . I do, awfully. You're alive.' He gripped her close, to test it. 'Really alive. Something worth having——'

'John!'

'Well, what do you *bother* me for?' he said, beneath his breath; and, suddenly as he had grasped her, he abandoned his hold again, flung her from him, and retired to the extreme end of the stage—that is, the room,—as he had done at the beginning of the scene.

After that, he reviewed his feelings, with an actor's instinct, curious as to what they were. They were oddly mixed,—he had certainly forgotten himself, taken himself

by surprise. On the other hand, he had resumed control with an effort for which nobody would give him credit,—unless Violet did. It was her fault, of that he was persuaded: not that she had flirted exactly, she did not do that: but she had bothered him, got in his way. She had persisted in her mistaken courses, teasing him,—Johnny had been teased. And then she had looked particularly pretty as she stood in front of him, prettier as her consciousness grew. She had never even doubted him before, not a glimmer of doubt, it was miraculous. And then, seeking an appeal to his better feelings, she had offered her husband's name. Offered it in that manner, the indubitable, the manner of those who name their nearest haven to pirates on the stormy sea. And then, as though that were not enough to drive him from his bearings, she had lost her temper, with a charming unexpectedness, really warming to the heart: since it was so exactly as Ursula never could have done in any circumstances. Why, Ursula would not have sacrificed her sash,—she would never have thought of tearing up her clothes. Ursula would have—it was hardly worth considering what she would have done at such a juncture, since never, never, in this world or the next, would she have let a man decoy her into such an indecorous position. Nor would she ever, ever, have forgiven it the said man, if she had.

Johnny's wicked eyes were widening to amusement, his habitual confidence, mislaid for a minute, was coming back. He felt much the better for the interlude, distinctly better, and grateful to his partner by the way. She had played up to him neatly, answered him well, and the best bit of action, by far, had been hers. There was always that point of view to be considered, even if the moral did not quite come off. Johnny looked from Violet, pale and silent, to the torn wisp of drapery, lying on the floor. Shocking,—he wondered she could have done it,—tearing her nice clothes about! Especially as it was probable she had not an enormous number to tear: not even so many as Ursula,

who thought herself so precious moderate, such a model to the frivolous world. He moved forward, picked up the wisp furtively, and rolled it about his hand. Such a good scene does not occur often in a lifetime, he felt inclined to remember it, keep a memento. It would be a lesson to Johnny,—a solemn lesson,—not to count too rashly on a girl's affection for her clothing. Or it might merely serve as a good story of her, to amuse Jemmy and Bert.

Finally,—he apologised: why we will not pretend to say: except that he came close up to Violet, and she lifted her eyes. Granted she took it like that, that he had betrayed the bargain of their friendship, there was nothing else for a man to do. He might have intended to 'shut her up,' temporarily, but to hurt her was another thing. For a passing instant, when her eyes reached his, he was really remorseful, and very nearly ashamed.

'I'm sorry,' he began impressively, and stopped dead. It was so extremely rare, in life, for John to apologise, that he thought it might as well make its full effect upon the company. It did: after a somewhat alarming interval, she smiled. Relieved extraordinarily, his spirits rose.

'Feelin' better?' he proceeded, in his artless manner, taking her hand, which she had not offered him, and stowing it carefully inside his arm. Johnny was an adept at what is called carrying the war into the enemy's country. The effect that Violet, not he, had lost control of herself lately, was instantly conveyed. She nodded and nearly laughed. She was a nice kid. After that the conversation was the old one, but inverted,—the parts changed. As follows.

'It's like this,' said Johnny, frowning. 'I'm pretty busy in these days. I suppose it's miles to your place.'

'Miles,' said Violet. 'We're half out of London.' She was recovering from the shock, or whatever it was.

'I've been wanting for some time to see all of you,' said Johnny. 'Some of you, Violet,—one or two. What about to-morrow, for instance? Or would the lot of you be out?'

'To-morrow is Sunday,' said Violet. 'I don't want to disturb you after luncheon, if you're really busy.'

'I'll get Blandy to call me early,' said Johnny, 'like the fellow in Wordsworth.' He waited,—she did not even correct him,—it had been worse than he thought. He had been a fair worm, he decided,—he had a certain pleasure in deciding it. 'Quite sure that's all right?' he enquired, looking down, and gathering her little hand more closely beneath his arm.

'Quite sure.' She nodded.

'You won't go back on it?' He still hesitated. 'I don't want to go all that way out for nothing, you know.'

'You shall be let in, I promise you.' She looked up and laughed. 'John, did you think I really would?'

'I've known women who would, soon as winking,' explained Johnny, relieved anew. 'Score over a man in front of the servants,—on her own premises,—sickening form! However, I admit you're not that class,—spiteful. I say,—he felt with his odd hand in a pocket,—'I suppose I've got the address?'

'Ursula has,' said Violet. Johnny laughed himself by an oversight. 'Are you sure you have got my name?'

'Sure, darling,' said Johnny, with sudden earnestness. 'Couldn't ever forget it, for all the time it is since I began.'

'Well, you'll be careful in front of my rough-haired visitors,' said Violet, coming back to the original object of the conversation, in beautiful style.

'I'll be jolly careful,' swore Johnny. 'Granted the rough-haired have the sense to keep away.'

Thus it was settled, and Johnny, fairly content with the world again, returned her to her husband in the dancing-hall, excessively late. This, of course, should have been the final score for Johnny, since the idea of making Violet thoroughly late for the 'other fellow' had been in the back of his mind, first and last, during the entire duration of that dialogue. But that part of his well-merited score

shrivelled utterly, owing to the fact that Mr. Shovell, a careless young gentleman, who never kept the close watch on his wife that her attractions warranted,—was even later than they.

The results were simply admirable.

Johnny turned up next day at his cousin's 'place,' amiable in temper, excellent in appearance, everything he should be, and perfectly prepared to do all she wanted. Violet did not even have to explain what she wanted,—he knew already. The chances were that from the first moment she had mentioned wanting to talk to him particularly, he had known. He was really at his best; nor was he conscious of being a model, which would have spoiled the effect, because he was absent-minded. He was so very absent, that Violet wondered if it were the results of the sleeping-engagement from which Blandy had too brusquely torn him: but it was not so. Johnny really had lots of things to think about, an increasing number, and in Violet's friendly atmosphere, amid a society which neither bored nor bothered him unduly, he could get some of his thinking done.

He talked to her a little at first, of course, answering questions on the subject of his mother, and 'drooping his eyes' on his surroundings. Then his cousin was snatched out of his hands by fresh arrivals, less deserving, perhaps, but competent,—'on the spot and respectable,' to use Johnny's own terms. He had no more to do than to be civil to such as spoke to him, and pick up a jest occasionally, that Shovell missed. As luck would have it, none of them,—except little rough-haired Miss Falkland, who did not count,—were women. Had women been there, they would have attacked him.

John was sure of that. After all, in twelve years' experience, one has stuff enough to generalise: and it had begun before he was twenty, if you came to that. He knew about women, of course, because one had to; but he had had a

little too many of them, all the same, in his life. Not only his aunts, but others. His aunts, being pious and proper, and passive and put-upon, and everything except picturesque or poor,—fearing and adoring him, in about equal measure, ever since he was fifteen years old,—he could have managed with, their type was constant. It was others, all the other sorts. It seemed to surprise his world that he ‘cut’ occasionally, with Bert or Jemmy, to the most savage regions of Ireland or Scotland, in order to do without them; but even there they sprang up, materialised, as it were, in his neighbourhood. Nor did they vanish again, like the convenient temptations of the saints. Johnny was not a saint, possibly: it must be that.

He could manage them, of course, practically all the sorts, at need: but that did not necessarily mean he was always wanting to do it. They seemed to think so, but at quite a lot of times he would sooner have done anything else. Only they attacked him, and of course he ‘bucked up’ and responded, in the necessary character, and so on. A man may flirt in self-defence, he may have to. He may have to do other things as well. Heartlessness is the smallest charge, in such contingencies, that may be laid against him. There is no saying where the incessant trifling and carping and cajoling of women may lead you. As for jealous women—good Lord!

Johnny shut his eyes, his head resting on his clenched hand, in a byway of Violet’s convenient little drawing-room. When he opened his eyes again,—wide, in his manner,—the rough-haired Miss Falkland was regarding him. One little shy glance, wondering and pitying, that was all. She thought he had a headache, probably.

He stirred, and looked about him again. He had lost himself rather. He liked the atmosphere of Violet’s little ‘place,’ and he remembered having liked it in just that manner when he last came there, which was some time since. The kid knew how to do things, like his mother. He wished Ursula would learn the difference, but it was

past hoping now. Except in his own private retreat at home, which he had furnished and arranged,—and then disarranged,—all himself, he was nowhere really at his ease. It was all very nice, of course, like Ursula ; but that was not the point. Colour and comfort were what Johnny required in life, each of the right sort,—his. His mother knew.

His thoughts turned upon his mother, since in this odd little corner of London, there really seemed no call to talk. She told him less and less of herself in these days, and he could not be with her all he wanted. She was ill, of course, that was what it meant : women of her kind did not talk of suffering. And since, owing to that, she could talk of little else, they were being cut off from one another steadily and surely. As surely, worse would come. One of his argosies of true affection, untricked and untainted, was driving on the rocks. One great treasure of his life would be spilt and wasted,—if it could be wasted. Perhaps it never could.

All unaware, Johnny dropped his head down again, since his hand was ready to receive it. He was sitting absolutely motionless, attending, with the surface of his brain, to the contentions of a group of clever young rough-haired men from the public offices. ‘Rough-haired,’ we had better mention, was not libellous, in Johnny’s use. Rough-haired merely referred to anything under age. Under twenty-five, in this instance, but the word would do. They were among his subjects, and he could have corrected some of their statements : but still he did not. It was not worth it, among such a respectable and honest gang.

Violet brought him his second cup of tea, unasked, while she still discoursed with the rough-haired behind her : and startled him out of his dream by her approach. He made a movement to rise, but she stopped it with two fingers, guarding him, as it were, with equal kindness, just as though he had not bullied and offended her the night before. That was how they were, the best of them,—

he would willingly have kissed her little fingers on his shoulder : only Shovell would have scalped him, and little, rough-haired Miss Falkland, over by the window, would have been shocked. One had to be careful, with girls of that age about.

Johnny sighed, and drank his tea out of a silver spoon, which he examined between whiles, the other hand still propping his languid head. He had no idea what he was doing, of course, only it happened Helena took note of every detail. It mattered not the least, to Helena's eyes, what he did : he remained simply royal, superb in every look and tone and movement,—stages, yes, worlds removed from every other man in the room.

Johnny was presently recalled to life, suddenly galvanised in his manner, because one of Violet's visitors outstayed all the others : and it entered John's languid head that this person had his eye upon a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Falkland too. He was waiting in short, and had for some time been waiting, for Johnny to go.

Very good : Johnny aroused, emerged, got that man with great address on a subject he knew nothing about, and treated him very badly, in order to make little Miss Falkland laugh at him : which she did. That is, she smiled slightly once, turning her head aside to conceal it. It was sufficient, and Johnny allowed the visitor to go. He was anxious to go by that time. In the character of the master of the house, which he assumed easily, Johnny helped him out, and then turned round. The room, except for his hostess in the sofa-corner, was empty.

'Where's she gone ?' said Johnny, vexed.

'Probably to speak to my baby in the garden,' said Violet. 'She likes them so.'

'Why isn't it on view ?' said Johnny.

'Oh, Charles took her outside. She loves the sun.'

Johnny proceeded to the French window of the room, and looked out of it, to see if she were speaking the truth.

Violet dodged him habitually, with that child. He had never yet got a fair view of it, and hardly believed in its existence. She might have been 'having him on,' on the subject. However, it was there: or at least, something was there, in dispute between Miss Falkland, and Violet's young husband, who was holding it.

'You'd better have it in, hadn't you?' said Johnny, having gazed at the group on the grass a moment, absorbing all its ingredients, with solemnity.

'Why?' said Violet, colouring a little.

'Because I'm going out. Might be dangerous if we met, mightn't it? We never have.'

Having teased her to that extent, rather heedfully, he swung suddenly through the window, out upon the grass. Her little plans not to parade her possession in his company amused him. He might as well show her he saw through them: just as well.

He went on up the garden, slightly smiling, and sniffing the air with contentment,—real air. It was quite a fresh part of London, and the close of a lovely spring day. It was Sunday too,—not that Sunday as such makes any difference, but little Miss Falkland in the distance had looked it,—it might have been her Sunday frock. Obviously, she came from a house where Sunday frocks are common. Johnny crossed the shadow of the house, into the further spaces of the little garden, where the sun still lingered, and where the trio stood.

He met his host first, and mentioned that Violet was fed-up with the lot of them, and wanted to read and not be bothered. Violet had not told him these facts, but he mentioned them as unquestionable. Whereupon, instead of stopping to retort, and open a general discussion, such as might have proved useful and introductory to Johnny's purposes, Mr. Shovell promptly took the white thing in his arms inside to her,—as though that was any good! The effect of this impulsive move, in a man who should have known better, was to 'brusquer les choses' con-

siderably more than Johnny intended. It put him out. Why, for all Shovell knew, the girl might have been frightened of him, left at his mercy like that! However, now he had to make the best of it. He was about to make one of the well-known and usual openings with under-twenty, when Helena started first.

'She is so good, Mr. Ingestre,' was Helena's opening,—enthusiastic. 'An absolute lamb!'

Johnny took her to allude to her hostess, and began answering carefully,—then found Miss Falkland was talking of the child. It was true he had not heard that kid cry, which looked like good management on the women's part, somewhere in the background. He implied this, in prettier language, for Miss Falkland's benefit.

'It's a question of health, generally,' said Helena. 'When they feel really comfortable, they never cry. Or at least practically never. And she's so sweetly well.'

'Ah, yes,' said Johnny. Certainly, health was something. A healthy child was a great thing, more than this bit of a girl imagined, in speaking so lightly.

However, he had no objection to Miss Falkland chattering, while he realised the effects of the level sunlight among her twisted meshes of hair,—mazes of her hair, as some Elizabethan called it. That fellow's idea was that Love walked the mazes, Johnny remembered,—they certainly entangled the eye of man. Helena's hair, miscalled red, was the beautiful chestnut threaded,—powdered, one might say,—with gold, which of all shades of red is least often seen. Her skin in full daylight had a pearly lustre, peculiar to that complexion, and her lashes were delicate and dark. Though still quite a schoolgirl, she was 'tall and stately,' like the Idyllic Maud. She was much more Johnny's match, by the ballroom standards, than Violet Shovell was, though he could not have 'pulled her about' very easily, nor cared to attempt it. He barely looked downward to the gold-dust wisps on her temples, as they strolled together on the grass-plot, side by side.

Her beauty astonished him, as it astonished him he had not observed it sooner: he had been uncommonly careless. Real beauty, new-blown, is not so often seen, that one can afford to waste notice on its imitations. But that is the worst of ballrooms. It took him quite a time, now, as he walked at her side on the turf, to make up his lost opportunities, at the rate of a glance a minute. He feared the stage of their acquaintance,—since, of course, nothing spoken in a ballroom counts,—would hardly allow him more. This was their first meeting,—he trusted Miss Falkland agreed with him. He rather thought by her manner that she did.

He tried to class her, but she fitted no class he had going, so he put her into a class by herself, and then added the attributes of the class afterwards, in proportion as he discovered them in her. By this ingenious means, highly to be recommended to those who class, everything Helena said or did fitted her new class nicely. He tried her with remarks on various appropriate subjects, and attended critically to her answers, soothed unaware by her gentle steady manner all the time. Miss Falkland asked him of her own accord to smoke, and refused with a blush to do likewise,—just right for her class, that was. Then he found two chairs, close together, on Shovell's lawn, which happened to suit his purposes, since the evening was warm. So, settling in one, while Helena settled in the other, he proceeded to a few investigations in the business matter. Not that he cared much about Helena's theatrical ideas or qualifications, but Violet seemed to have set her heart on it, and that urged a little effort.

He found she had studied on the right lines, in quite good hands, and only wanted, as usual, a little pushing into publicity. John knew innumerable people of influence, in the dramatic world, since his permanent taste lay that way. He thought them over, while he looked at the girl before him. She looked too composed and ladylike to promise at all well, but she had presence and intelligence,

and—just possibly—imagination. It would look well, and be amusing by the way, if he made Ursula put together a little party, and did a scene or two of something easy with Miss Falkland, to show her off. Rosalind was a part that would suit her nicely; and Johnny would wrestle for her willingly as Orlando,—it would be exercise, if nothing else. It was a bit of a pity there was not a duel in the piece,—a duel with swords; but one cannot adapt Shakespeare to that extent: there is a popular prejudice against it.

Then he thought of a few other parts for her, building plans idly while he smoked,—to think profoundly on the matter was not worth while. But Rosalind was the best, the girl had the air and build for it. Graceful and breezy comedy was her line, granted she possessed a line at all. That would have to be seen in rehearsal,—at Johnny's house for choice. Ursula—well, Ursula could never be regarded as a serious obstacle, when his own mind was made up.

Having settled all this to his satisfaction, in the background of his mind: and having surprised Helena a good deal by the kind of questions he asked, and by his fashion of looking at her, cool and penetrating and impersonal, while she responded: Johnny produced one or two generalities which sounded very well to himself, though they certainly meant nothing,—how could they? There was nothing to tell her but that her appearance was in her favour, which, granted her ladylike class, it was impossible to say. Had she been the ordinary thing, of course he would have said it.

As it was, he lay silent for a period, smoking and looking at the sky; during which period Miss Falkland, not venturing to guess his thoughts, was respectfully silent too. He was different, it occurred to her, out-of-doors, from what he had been within them, previously; nicer, nearer to her, so to speak. Dreadfully clever as he undoubtedly was, his royalty was in abeyance. He was bare-headed,

and his hair disordered by his lazy attitude, which may have had something to do with it. He looked young,—nearly as young as Harold,—distinctly younger than Mr. Auberon, when he behaved like this. Not at all married, either, that remained the oddest thing. She tried to find a term for him, as Johnny had tried to find a class for her. She had heard heaps of people call Mr. Ingestre handsome, but she did not think it was the word. She had seen so many so-called handsome men. He was 'nice,' she resolved upon that. It served the turn.

'I hate London,' said Mr. Ingestre, deliberately.

'Oh, so do I,' cried Helena, forgetting her respect.

'I say!' murmured Johnny, looking at her. A girl in her first season,—well in the front of it, too,—ought to have liked London. It was not quite right of her.

However, he realised that if he began at this point to talk to her about the country, he would certainly be late for whatever the next thing was,—and there were several. So, after another pause, he looked at his watch, got up, held out his hand to her, and strolled indoors.

The double result of this proceeding was to impress Miss Falkland in the rear, who decided that he must be even cleverer than she had suspected, he was so funny and vague; and to take Mrs. Shovell in the front, by surprise; for Johnny caught her alone with her baby, *tête-à-tête*: and so unexpected was his descent, that she could not dispose of her incumbrance, nor even reach the bell.

This amused him. Her appearance with the creature was amusing too, and novel: he had never seen her with it before. He took them in, separately and in combination, at his leisure, for a short time. The kid seemed pretty well like all others, he decided, which rather surprised him, being Violet's; but it looked fit, as the rough-haired Miss Falkland said. Its form was tremendous.

'Well?' said Violet, getting tired of it.

'Well,' said Johnny, still at leisure, 'I didn't propose.'

'I hoped you would,' said Violet. 'Not marriage, you know, but something more helpful for the poor girl.'

'I should have said marriage would be the most helpful,' said Johnny. 'Much the best thing for her, anyhow.'

'John,—you don't mean it?' She looked round.

'What do you suppose she began talking about?' said Johnny. 'Guess.'

'I haven't an idea,' said Violet. 'I'm rather surprised she did begin.'

'She began right off,' said Johnny, impressively, pointing, 'on Kids.'

'I'm sorry,' said Violet. 'I'm afraid that was Margery's fault. I shouldn't have left her about. We apologise.'

'However,' pursued Johnny, 'there's no harm in her speaking a part for us down there, if she likes: no harm at all. She'll not do it much worse than others of her sort, I dare say: and I'll have a few people in to hear.'

'How terribly kind—of Ursula,' said Violet.

'Of course,' said Johnny, reminded, 'Ursula may not have a day, when we get back from Devonshire. The cards are pretty thick on the ground, in our place, and she's been sending out some thousands too. Quite likely she's full up, when I come to think. If so, it's off.'

'No, John,—nothing of the sort. If so, you ask your few people here, and proceed as originally intended.'

'Oh, do I?' scoffed Johnny. 'Not likely. You've no idea, the sort of people they are. On the line, most of 'em, —over it, the women. Not your form, my sweet child, at all.' He seemed complacent.

Mrs. Shovell frowned over this for a time. Her baby, which was certainly well-behaved, was engaged in eating her gold chain the while.

'Well,' she said, submitting thoughtfully, 'I leave it to you.'

'Quite sure?' asked Johnny.

'Quite. Because you know about those things,—I don't.'

'As usual,' he concluded, in a moralising tone. 'Isn't it? Yes. Very good, now I'm going. If that was my kid, I shouldn't give it gold to eat—er—at present. Later on, it might take to it. But I suppose you *know* about those things, don't you?'

'I had thought I did, till now.' She laughed a little, and rescued her chain from the baby's clutches. 'John, it's dreadfully kind of you, really. Then I bequeath Helena to you entirely,—may I?'

'Entirely,' said Johnny. 'Body and soul. Can you reconcile it with your conscience as an—er—matron?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Shovell definitely. 'I'm thankful.'

'Better not be thankful too soon,' said Johnny with a glint. 'The results may be *other* than you think.'

'Don't be too hard on her,' entreated Violet. 'She's so nice.'

'Much too nice,' said Johnny. 'That's the bother. It generally is. What's more, she thinks I'm nice, at present. Bet you she does!'

'And you don't want to make such a nice girl change her mind. Poor John, no, it's horrid for you.' She laughed, but glanced at him. 'What are you really thinking?' she asked, and waited.

'She's a bit more suitable to your place than mine,' he said, slowly. 'You'd have done better to stick to her. That's what I said before, started with, isn't it? Why do you make me repeat myself? She doesn't belong to our lot much—not much—I can't see her somehow. Course I may be wrong.' He held out his finger to the baby.

'Don't lose heart before you try her,' laughed Violet, eyebrows up. He was distinctly funny this evening, not tiresome at all, tired was nearer the mark. And so clever! She was almost certain, as soon as he had spoken, that he was right. He knew women so well, and he knew artists too: he had real experience of both.

For the moment while he stood close to her, silent and

passive apparently, condescending to her child's little hand, the power he carried about the world unused seemed to break through its barriers and reach her. That was the royalty in him really, that Helena had sought after her first interview to express. It was not, like his father's, the common dignity of an ancient name and arrogant training : John had more cause for pride than that. That power in reserve of his seemed now to throw Helena's little ambitions to a great distance, though he said no word of it, nor hinted a comparison. His own had been so far more real, more firmly founded,—proven indeed ! With every year that passed, he knew better what he had wasted, facing the folly of it squarely, as he had done from the first. It had not embittered, either, the eternal youth of art in him was too real for that. It only seemed to bring him up short like this, at times, as though protesting at his unworthy destiny. Baffled on two sides, in life, he faced, as home affairs now stood, a double failure. Yet, for all a single failure meant to an Ingestre, his gallant attitude towards life never varied. He was still the young outlaw, highwayman, watching for fresh chances always, reining his horse back, his eyes upon the road.

' Well, anyhow, I'll see to it,' he resumed, after a considerable interval. Dragging his gaze from vacancy, he looked down. ' What are you laughing at?—yes, you were,—saw you ! Teach you to laugh at me, bit of a kid ! Pretending to have kids of your own, I'll take it away from you.' After this preliminary, very rapid, he cleared his throat and started again.

' Anyhow,' he resumed, ' I won't have those people here. That's a rotten idea of yours, really. Our place is better, jollier atmosphere, smarter scenery, background to tone. Domestic situation they recognise,—so on.' Pause. ' Write you about it, or she will,' said Johnny, gravely. ' Good-bye. Good-bye—er—Margery. I say !—call that a hand !'

PART II



THE ARTIST

I

URSULA disliked Johnny's idea heartily, particularly that it concerned Helena Falkland, and came by way of Violet Shovell; but she did not resist it for long. She literally could not resist her husband when he was set upon a thing, though she was obstinate enough about details. She and John had more than one acrid dialogue over the matter, while they were in the country, but never over the fact of the party, which was understood after the first encounter, —simply over the management of it. Here she proved denser than usual to Johnny's able and eloquent demonstrations. She showed an entire inability to grasp the fact that business and pleasure cannot be mixed; and wanted from the first to turn, by indiscriminate invitations, her husband's test of the girl before experts into a fashionable party.

'I don't want a lot of hangers-on,' explained Johnny, the first morning they got back to town. 'They can see her on the boards later, if she ever gets there, which isn't likely.'

'But you are going to act, aren't you?' argued Ursula. 'Everybody likes that.'

'It's not a costume exhibition,' said Johnny, 'which is what everybody likes. They may stop her in the middle, probably. They'll probably want to stop her before she begins.'

'Who may?'

'Oh, our lot. Monty Mitchell and the rest.'

'You mean that horrid Mitchell's coming?'

'That horrid Mitchell's my principal guest. I'd have had Mrs. Monty alone if I'd dared,—she's a far better actor, not to say judge; but I didn't dare in the circumstances. And it's better Monty should see her anyhow,—seeing's something in the case.'

'I suppose you mean to dress,' said Ursula.

'I don't,' said Johnny. 'I shall wear what I'm standing in, which'll be golf-clothes, probably, at two on Sunday. And she'll undress, if anything, for Rosalind,—hope she will.' He pushed his cup to be refilled.

'You needn't be unpleasant,' said Ursula.

She considered the new material, quietly, while she filled his cup for him. It was that superior manner of hers Johnny found so intolerable,—as though she had been his nursery-governess, or his Sunday-school teacher, not his wife. He was certain at times she put it on to vex him,—Ursula was not really like that. His sentiments about her perplexed himself. Lately, down in Devonshire, she had seemed to shine, by the side of her mother and sisters. John had depended on her, inevitably, as his defence against her far more deadly relations: and Ursula had defended him, kindly and capably too. Out riding on the hills, he had managed almost to like her in the old way, once or twice: but the impression did not wear. As soon as they reached the background of their own hearth, and the greater variety and contrast of London, they slipped back to the miserable deadlock of misunderstanding again. She would not understand him: of late she would not even try. She turned her back on all his interests, looked away from his friends. Her appearance of self-sufficing completeness outraged him just as before; her manners, movements, even her exhausted ill-managed voice was a daily trial to his temper, as much as what she said. He constantly exhorted her to speak up and to speak out, even when he could make her speak at all. He knew it was a matter of health largely, but his growing impatience and distaste were not matters that could be reasoned with,

even had he been one who lived by reason,—and he was not.

The new material did not please Ursula, any more than the old. She preferred John to dress, to shine as much as possible, if he really intended to show himself in public. It was something to exhibit him, if she could not approve. Her hope was that he was 'ragging' as usual, misleading her in order to get his way. If she flattered him a little, and asked some of his personal acquaintance in the good sets, he would not seriously insist on reciting to them in golf-clothes, she was sure.

'I suppose you've asked Violet,' she resumed, 'and all her lot.'

'No, I haven't, I don't want her,' said Johnny patiently. 'And having some sense, she doesn't want to come. You don't seem to have an idea of the thing, Ursula. It's not a show, it's an examination.'

'What are you acting for then?' said Ursula huffily.

'I? Backing her up. She needs somebody, and I'm the obvious, specially as I've been rehearsing her. She'll be—er—used to me. I'll sit in a chair and read the part if you'd rather,—the other girl will have to, anyhow. But it's more fun for her if I act it, naturally.'

'What other girl?' said Ursula.

'There's another girl in the piece,' explained Johnny, 'called Celia, a deuced pretty name.'

There was a pause. 'That reminds me,' said Ursula. 'The Auberon boy would like to come, with his sister, from Hampstead. I ought to ask them to something, and it's just a chance.'

'Just,' agreed Johnny. 'Hampstead,—great snakes!'

Ursula, disregarding his ejaculations, was making a note on the list of names that lay at her side. Why Celia should remind her of Hampstead, Johnny did not ask. The connection between Arden and Hampstead seemed to him far-fetched, but it was just like Ursula. Give her some-

thing like Arden, and she thought of something like Hampstead, instantly,—no hope.

‘Anyone else you’d like?’ he enquired, watching her. ‘A few classes from the High Schools, now,—classics, do ’em good. Pleasant Sunday afternoon for the masses,—we might take Hyde Park.’

‘Why do you do it on Sunday?’ said Ursula, looking up from her notes. ‘I’m sure the girl’s people won’t like that. The Falklands are Church, I know.’

‘I do it for my people, who are a bit more important, and happen to have no other time. Did you ever consider what the dramatic profession is,—worst-paid and hardest-worked of any, except sick-nursing.’

‘How can you compare them?’ said Ursula indignantly.

‘I don’t, for a minute,’ said Johnny. ‘Anyone can smooth a pillow. You’d do it by nature: so would little Miss rough-haired Rosalind. Violet would do it—oh, rippingly.’ He stretched his arms and looked at her. ‘Pity I’ve never been ill.’

Ursula coloured a little. She would have given much to have John ill, really helpless on her hands: she could have taught him a few things then. How much of woman’s boasted faculty for nursing is love of power, in origin? Ursula had a passion for power, a tyrant’s passion, for she dreamt of a power for which she need not pay. No other would have satisfied her finally. It is a fact that two cannot have that peculiar power, the enchanter’s, in a household. It is always either the man or the woman, sometimes neither, never both. Nor does it come by desiring, the contrary. Johnny had it by nature, so Ursula had been driven to succumb. She had not realised he would beat her on her own ground, in this fashion, in marrying him. He could attract by a look or a word, make the friends he wanted, and keep them, what was more. That fine feminine influence she had hoped to wield had been swallowed up in his far more influential personality. Even his vanity was a bigger thing than hers, hers merely

rankled, strangling within her. He was a readier assailant too,—he seemed to enjoy the assault. When he teased, as at present, she had no choice but outspoken fury, or silence ; and she preferred silence—unfortunately.

Johnny watched her a minute, and thought her a dead thing. Then he got up. 'I won't have any of 'em,' he said from the hearthrug, in a keen pleasant tone. 'I hope you have grasped that. You can of course have a tea-party on your own in the servants' hall, or anywhere fairly remote, and I'll manage my gang in the music-room, with—er—Rosalind's assistance. But I rather want you, and you'd better come.'

A pause, Ursula preserving rigid silence, though she felt the blow. She knew what that tone meant, when John or his father used it. She was raging internally,—rage that would have served her well, had her principles allowed her to use it. If she had broken out on him for five minutes, and treated his insolence as it deserved, he would have laughed and let her have her friends, with but short verbal resistance. If she had laid her head on the cloth and cried, he would have done the like, hastily, since emotion was the thing of all things that took effect on Johnny. Had she even changed countenance or colour,—but she was pale and still as a statue to his eyes, and even cut her bread and ate mechanically.

'Well?' said Johnny. 'Let's hear what you propose, because I want to finish. It's no fun going back to the beginning again every time. I'd sooner have things clear—where possible.'

'I have invited the Weyburns already,' said Ursula.

Johnny sat down. 'Very good, then, it's done,' he said quietly. 'My father would say, *un*-invite them. Find the best way out for yourself and go hang. But you've taken care to choose people I care for, and you've probably told 'em all about it. Haven't you? All the pretty little entertainment your nice husband was getting up?'

'I understood that I could,' said Ursula.

'What d'you mean by understanding it?' flashed Johnny. 'Where is your understanding? Do I speak English or do I not? I said I wouldn't have a lot of ignorant snobs filling up my rooms on this occasion, in so many words. I want the people I care for,—whose opinion I care for——'

'You just said you cared for the Weyburns,' said Ursula.

'I don't care *that* for their opinion on art, and you know it, and I should hope they do too. They ought to, by now. I promised—er—I said I'd do this thing properly, no rotting——'

'Why not say whom you promised,' said Ursula scornfully. 'You needn't be so careful of my feelings. I always supposed you cared for her opinion, and I'm perfectly ready to ask her too. I implied as much.'

Ursula felt intensely moderate and reasonable in making this concession. Johnny was almost desperate at her density. He gripped the breakfast-table with both his fine brown hands.

'And I said I would *not*, and why, and I had some hope you followed. Violet Shovell's a deuced clever girl in her way, but she's not an expert, and she knows it. When the Falkland gang attacked her, she did the best she could: she "passed,"—shunted the thing to my hands. I'm not an expert myself, merely the common go-between, but I'm a stage better than her. I propose to "pass" in turn to Mitchell and Fanny Mitchell—who's first-rate. They'll pass the girl in the other sense, examiner's, as I said; accept her, or damn her. If she's damned, she's damned,—and be damned to her.' Johnny laughed suddenly, collapsing into his seat.

After the next pause—'I never heard anyone use bad language so deliberately as you do,' said Ursula, with white disgust. 'It may amuse you to say,—it does not me to hear.'

'I hoped I was speaking English,' said Johnny. 'I was trying to, quite hard. And I added a joke, that's all. Couldn't help it somehow,—never mind.'

'If you talked what you call good English a little oftener,' said Ursula,—and so on. The discussion need not be pursued. The result, after a little more wrangling, was a compromise: with all the advantages, of course, to him. He deserved them, in his opinion, considering the way he had controlled his temper, and the trouble he had taken to explain. Ursula would play hostess, and 'behave decently' to his respected friends, who would come in any clothes they chose, and behave in the manner that suited them, since it was obvious they were doing him a favour by coming at all; and he would accept the minimum of hers, granted they were warned of the bohemian nature of the entertainment. But they were not, said Johnny, to make a beastly noise, either of chatter or applause: the latter above all, since there would be nothing to applaud,—and Ursula could tell them so. She was to have drinks ready, the proper drinks; and people who minded smoking could stay away.

II

Quentin's clever aunt sent him a letter.

This lady, Miss Celia Havant, requires a brief note, though she was far too busy with useful works to intervene much in the life of idle moneyed households like the Ingestres' and Falklands'. She was slightly acquainted with Ursula Ingestre, whom she met occasionally on committees. Ursula had, during a casual meeting of the kind, stored the fact that one of the young Auberons was in Miss Havant's charge, and it was thus that the name Celia, which John deigned to approve, had conveyed Ursula's practical thoughts direct to Hampstead, rather than to Arden, during the altercation with her husband.

Miss Havant was 'Hampstead' simply to Ursula: not the aboriginal type, in the days before London swallowed the suburb, but its up-to-date equivalent. All kinds of wise people respected her deeply, regardless of the facts that

she was far from wealthy, what Ursula called ' sudden ' in manner, oddly dressed, indifferent to the social grades to a really reprehensible degree, and absurdly young-looking to boot. When Mrs. Falkland first saw Quentin's aunt, issuing from a Saturday matinée performance at his side, she thought Quentin had been deceiving her, calling himself unattached, and then seeming on such easy terms with this young and attractive companion. When he introduced her as his aunt, Mrs. Falkland had another shock and looked again. Miss Havant had the appearance of a tall fair boy, quite pretty in the face, though thin and rather worn at close quarters. She said three things Mrs. Falkland did not the least understand, by way of making friends, and then nodded to her nephew and departed—Mrs. Falkland told Helena—' stalking.'

Miss Havant, in philanthropy as in other things, was given to experiment and adventure: but since she was clever and observant, by the time she was five-and-thirty, her experiments, as a rule, came off. She rarely disturbed her nephew with her half-completed enterprises or partially-solved problems, though Quentin was ready enough to help her. That is, when the problems referred to concerned men: when they dealt with women, girls, or such snares of the serious worker, he retired, firmly, in Miss Havant's favour, or looked across the distractions to something else with his steel-coloured, far-reaching eyes. This peculiarity in him his aunt recognised, as did Harold Falkland and all Quentin's real intimates. Quentin struggled with a fierce, cold contempt for such as let themselves be diverted from the work of the world by sexual entanglements. It was only conscience, an admitted duty to society, that ever made him look that way at all. He strove with the instinct in himself because, being an honest observer, he could not but admit the weight of the temptation in other lives. It was a known phenomenon, to be reckoned with, so much he allowed, but he had no pleasure in dwelling on its manifestations about him; the contrary, he detested the

necessity. Consequently, when Miss Havant found herself, that spring, on the point of going to Italy with the problem of a young female unsolved on her hands, she tossed up between disturbing Quentin, whom she knew so well, about it : and plaguing Mrs. Ingestre, whom she hardly knew at all. Finally she appealed to both.

The letter fell into Quentin's evening leisure, the after-dinner period he allowed himself in his own room for smoke and society. Young Falkland as usual was sharing it : but to Harold's disgust, Harold's brother-in-law had also insinuated himself upon the scene, and lay lankily in Quentin's longest chair, studying a pamphlet he had picked up, in a superior manner, through his eye-glasses. Whenever this gentleman, Thomas by name, left the company of the Captain, who bored him, for that of the younger fry, a certain strain ensued. Mr. Thomas was a junior partner in a shipping firm, and just sufficiently older than the pair to patronise them. Harold's dislike for him was of a very old date, and Quentin fell into his way of thinking, easily. Indeed, no man could have called Harold friend for long, who did not dislike Thomas in the correct degree. Harold had never cared much for his elder sister before her marriage, but since that event, he spoke of her now and then as ' poor Con.' Nothing would induce him to believe that Con liked Thomas, though he admitted the poor girl put a good face on it, with a courage in adversity to be expected of the Falkland blood. He also pointed out to Helena that it would be better for her even to marry nobody than a crass creature like Thomas ; whereto Helena, laughing lightly, seemed to agree.

' Here's another,' was Quentin's comment on his correspondence.

' Bridget again ? ' asked Harold, who knew Miss Havant's vigorous hand. Quentin's young sister had been steadily in hot water throughout her youth, so he presumed the disturbing intelligence referred to her.

'It's not Bridget, this time. It's Aunt Celia,—just her style.'

Whereupon, trusting Thomas was engaged, he gave Harold a specimen.

'MY DEAR,' [wrote Miss Havant],

'I am vexed in mind about the Jacobys, and I thought it better to warn you, in case the rat Jacoby came bothering Bridget in my absence, and she appealed to you. You are to give him nothing, if you please, and harden Bridget's heart. He is capable of producing a new story at a moment's notice, but, however thrilling, it will not be true. I have disproved most of his original statements, on application in the proper quarters.

'1. He never possessed an estate in Poland, and I doubt if he ever saw the country.

'2. His wife is not dead, though pretty bad, I fear, poor thing. I shall try to see her in Geneva as I pass through, and write you the facts.

'3. He is not destitute,—owing to his last disgraceful escapade he has means enough for his present needs. Remember this.

'4. He is not a revolutionary, or at least no sort I respect——'

'Does your aunt respect revolutionaries?' drawled Thomas, at this point. He had been listening, of course.

'As a rule,' said Quentin. 'I mean, if they are pukka revolutionaries, out to die for a healthy cause: not simply sentimental.'

'What do you mean by sentimental?'

'I suppose I mean, when they're set on dying for a cause that's lost already. Some of them are.'

'Ireland?' enquired Harold.

'India?' sneered Thomas.

'That sort of thing,' said Quentin to Harold. 'They're poets generally.'

'You mean Miss Havant doesn't like that sort the best?' said Harold, looking subtle.

'No,' said Quentin. 'Why should she, or any person of sense?'

'Go on with the Jacobys,' said Harold.

'Who are the Jacobys?' cut in Thomas, as Quentin was about to proceed.

'Nobody knows who he is, and he comes from nowhere. Like most natives of nowhere he calls himself a Polish Count, and we guess him to be a Russian Jew, but he might be any nation out of five, and any age up to fifty.'

'Eloquence,' observed Thomas to Harold, who did not attend to him.

'He's always turning up with a new story,' pursued Quentin, 'and bothering people. My sister calls him the Old Pretender,—he's certainly pretended to most things in his time. . . . I'd have settled him long ago if I'd been let alone,' said Quentin to Harold, 'but needless to say, I wasn't.'

'How did you come across him?' said Thomas.

'My people came across him first, in the country. He took in a whole country district when my aunt was young, making out he was an exile in a righteous cause,—I forget which,—and a popular hero at home. He actually got a woman my aunt knew, teacher in the same school, to marry him. She was quite a decent person, and why she married Jacoby, goodness knows.'

'Oh, you needn't stop at that,' said Thomas. 'They do. He seems able to get at women generally. What's he like to look at?'

'He's rat-like,' said Quentin, with a single icy glance. 'I call him the rat, because he lives on the community.' Since Thomas was determined to attend, he put the letter away, and took up the paper with the other hand.

'Oh come, young feller,' said Thomas, 'let's have the rest. It was just getting interesting.'

Quentin did not like being a young feller, nor did he

want, on consideration, to tell Thomas the rest. Harold looked ashamed of his brother-in-law, who was always abounding like this in the wrong places. He seemed equally blind to Auberon's high worth in the scheme of things, and his own vulgar insignificance. Nor was it any use Harold scoring over him, however brilliant the score; for in private, Thomas never granted that it was one, and in public, Harold hurt the feelings of his sister Con. There is no getting round such family complications, even for a budding diplomat. Harold had to bear it, and help Auberon to do the like.

'Then do the Jacobys mean man and wife?' said the irrepressible Thomas. 'What's Mrs. Rat like?'

'I have never seen Mrs. Jacoby,' said Quentin. 'She is very ill in Geneva, where she has been keeping Mr. Jacoby for years.'

'Keeping him, has she? Does she earn?'

'She has a little boarding-house, and they've made it pay.'

'Oh well, that says something for her. Who's the other Jacoby, then,—a young one?'

'A young one, yes. His daughter.'

'Oh come,' said Thomas, turning. 'Now we're getting to the root of the matter, aren't we?' It is not to be denied that Mr. Thomas liked teasing Quentin, and perhaps, had some excuse. Thomas called him a young prig when he was out of temper, and Quentin, in his company, often so appeared. Worst when he was shyest, of necessity, and Thomas had got him safely on a subject where he was shy. But the last thing he intended was to refuse battle, on that or any question Thomas might choose. He settled to this one now.

'What's her name?' asked Thomas.

'Angela, I believe. They call her Jill.'

'Jill? Jill Jacoby?—Oh, I say,' said Thomas, having laughed, 'I shouldn't have anything to do with her.'

'Why?' said Quentin.

'Not with a name like that. Sounds fast.'

'Even if it did,' said Harold, 'which I don't admit, it would only prove the rapidity of her rat-like parents,—not her own.'

'It's really not worth arguing,' said Quentin to Harold. 'I'm sorry,' he said to Thomas, 'I can't help you to much about Miss Jacoby. My sister has seen her once or twice up there, at Hampstead; and they're sorry for her, naturally.'

'Why naturally?'

'Well, because everything's against her, in life.' The boy paused, considering. 'It's no joke to belong to a man like that, who lives by sponging on her mother's old friends.'

'Oh, that's how he lives on the community, is it?'

'That's how he's lived till now, when he wasn't living on his wife and daughter. They both work for him,—but begging's his trade. He's a born beggar, on paper. He doesn't do it in the life so well.'

'How do you know, my young friend?' said Thomas, curiously. 'Did he ever beg from you?'

'Look here,' broke out Harold, 'you mayn't know you're going a little far, considering——'

'Considering what?' smiled Thomas, 'Auberon always has first-hand documents for what he asserts. You told me so yourself.'

'I've got the documents,' said Quentin. 'Jacoby didn't beg from me personally, though,—he's too sharp,—nor my aunt, whom he knows, and who knows him. He wrote to my sister, at school. It was a good letter. He worked his daughter, for all she was worth. His daughter is about my sister's age,—that was a good card. She's clever, too,—a genius—that was another. She's lame——'

'Lame?' gasped Thomas.

'Yes,—he made the best of that. He also knew my sister was on her own in England, and probably mistress of some cash. Best of all, Jacoby had seen my sister once, noticed the sort she was, and made an impression on her.'

'What impression's that?' said Thomas. 'I should say,

what sort ? ' He felt, more than he liked, Quentin's manner, but he was still trying to be funny.

' My sister is at present sixteen,' said Quentin, ' and when Jacoby made the impression I referred to, she was twelve. The sort she is is generous and hot-headed, with large ideas and—er—ramshackle head-over-heels impulses.' Quentin glanced sidelong. ' Falkland knows her. Jacoby played his cards well, and fetched Bridget easily. Or rather, he would have fetched her, only——'

' She showed the letter to you,' said Thomas.

' She did, yes, providentially. That's my first-hand document, and I could find it for you if you liked. On that authority I pronounced Jacoby a rat, and a sneaking rat, and a rat that had far better, for the community's sake, be poisoned off-hand. I may be wrong,' said Quentin, suddenly diverting his eyes to vacancy. They had been fixing Thomas throughout the story about his sister.

' I don't say you are,' said Thomas, momentarily overcome by a rhetorical trick Quentin had practised in debate with great success. ' I say,—was Miss Jill concerned in that ? I mean, does she back his begging schemes ? '

' I don't know,' said Quentin. ' I don't know her.'

' It looks fishy, to me. Did you answer the letter ? '

' I did. My second year at Oxford. I could improve on it now,' said Quentin, ' but it wasn't bad of its kind.'

' Did you enclose a cheque ? ' said Harold.

Mr. Auberon, still looking at vacancy in a far-reaching manner, did not reply. Harold was much too acute, and had to be taught his place occasionally.

' Has he written since ? ' said Thomas, after the pause.

' No,' said Quentin, awakening. ' To neither of us. If he's in London, though, we shall hear of him probably. My aunt seems to think so. I'm afraid he's a bad lot. It's a bore.'

He looked down, and did not seem deeply affected, but that was his way. Harold knew he was worried very well : feeling responsible, for his little sister, probably.

Later on, when Thomas had lounged out, Harold heard the rest of the facts. He discovered that when Auberon said a bad lot, he meant it. This did not surprise him, as he had noted the form of words,—Thomas, that amiable trifler, had merely noted the tone of voice, and passed it over.

Jacoby had proved himself a bad lot in the strictest sense, and no companion for his own child, whom he had brought, with his sick wife's consent, to London. What Mrs. Jacoby in consenting did not know, was that the third of the party consisted of an Englishwoman with a little money, whom she herself had befriended in a foreign land, and received on her premises. She was the more easily deceived, that Jacoby had promised repeatedly to make his daughter's fortune, when opportunity should serve him, in her mother's native country. Opportunity served Jacoby in the manner we have mentioned. He had a sentimental and rather maudlin fondness for the girl Jill, and a very real pride in her attainments. She had been assured by both parents all her life that she had great, world-shaking gifts; and the fact that she was lame, unknown, and practically destitute, was to make no difference to her shaking the world. Jacoby was, if nothing else, a romantic, and he talked to his daughter beautifully, on the way to London. Unfortunately, when he got there, his taste for living in the toils of romance, however sordid, attracted him so irresistibly to the lowest walks of theatrical society, that Jill took her prospects into her own hands, soon after arrival, and applied to Miss Havant, whose address she had, for independent assistance.

Her account of her father's habits was such that Miss Havant urged her strenuously to find some way of living apart from him if she could. She offered to take her back to Geneva, but that the girl refused. She had had enough of the hopeless struggle in Geneva, and preferred to try her luck in a fresh land. So Miss Havant, who never discouraged enterprise, sent her to Mrs. Ingestre for advice, with an introduction.

The remains of the note to her nephew described these final steps of hers, and merely appealed to him, since he knew Mrs. Ingestre, to keep an eye if he could on the lame girl Jacoby and her fate, until Miss Havant herself returned from Italy.

'So there we are,' said Quentin, laying down the letter. 'What do you make of it.'

'Looks as if your aunt trusted her,' observed Harold. Quentin admitted it, only his eyes reserved a certain distrust of his aunt. She was over-sanguine, he considered.

'What about the mother?' said Harold.

'Leave her out,' said Quentin. 'She's either too ill to matter, or a fool. She couldn't have let the girl come away in the fellow's company otherwise. My aunt means to see if anything can be made of her, but I doubt it. She had better be struck off.'

'You're jolly charitable, this evening,' said Harold, looking at him. He discounted the severity of Auberon's form of speech, habitually. Besides, it struck him he looked tired to-night. He overworked, of course: nothing the Falklands could do would prevent him from working half the night. Auberon was one of the fellows who always have too many irons in the fire, and do all things too intently. Here he was taking this new affair, none of his business, much too hard. Harold knew of course how he secretly hated the type of thing: that was largely the reason of his manner, probably,—he was schooling his own distaste.

'Perhaps the girl will get a job,' said Harold cheerfully. 'There are plenty going.'

'A cripple,' said Quentin.

That again was characteristic. Quentin, in coming of a hardy race of fighters and climbers, had a natural aversion from physical deficiency, the halt and maimed. It cropped out like that, involuntarily, when he was most bent on being kind. Harold pondered for a time over the somewhat

baffling problem of young girls who were cripples. Having an ingenious mind, he tried to get round it.

'It's only her knee,' he said. 'Not hip-disease or anything really revolting. What I mean is, she can probably get about and see to things.'

It did not seem to console Quentin, wrapped in the wider speculation as to whether Miss Jacoby, being lame, had better have been born at all. 'If I ever become really diseased, Falkland,' his meditations finished of a sudden, 'or idiotic, or useless, I shall expect you to shoot me through the head.'

'Right,' said Harold cordially. 'Same here. Now let's hear what you think of doing, about the rat's daughter.'

'Oh, doing,'—Quentin's face changed,—'that's straight enough. I must see the woman whose address she had—Mrs. Ingestre—and get at her through the society.'

'And what if she hasn't used the address?'

'I shan't begin to think what, until I find she hasn't used it. Nothing, probably. If she's taken the other alternative, and rejoined her rat-like father, she's not worth bothering about.'

Harold discounted this in turn. 'She might like her rat-like father,' he said easily. 'People do.'

Quentin took it calmly, his hands behind his head.

'Her rat-like father might like her,' he substituted, 'since she has fed him for years. If he had fed her, like the generality of fathers, I might think the other way possible. As it is, I don't.'

'Good,' said Harold. 'We're getting on. The only thing you're overlooking is——'

'Well?' said Quentin.

'That women, as such, like the people they feed. They like them for being fed,—no other reason necessary.'

'Jove!' said Quentin. 'That's rather smart,—so they do.'

Harold did not the least suppose he was convinced, for all this apparent courtesy. He was used to being the dust

under Auberon's boots, and never more than when he was courteously treated.

'We are dealing,' he announced, 'with a girl with brains.'

'By Jove!' said Harold.

'There's simply no doubt of it,' said Quentin. 'Look here; who has been running that infernal boarding-house at Geneva,—at a profit, mind,—for the last five years? Not the mother, obviously. Servants, in foreign parts, can't be counted upon. The girl did all that, and she trained herself for a profession too. She has certificates from professors of elocution at Geneva, real certificates,—and she has given readings and so on at the swagger English hotels along the lake. So I am informed, by Bridget, whose endless details are of use sometimes. . . . Very good, *she* has done it, the parent-rats have not. Mrs. Rat—I beg her pardon, I'm getting as bad as Thomas—Mrs. Jacoby confined herself to telling everybody in reach the girl was a natural genius, and had no call to work at all. Geniuses needn't do anything, you know: they just exist.'

'Oh, don't get on to geniuses,' implored Harold. 'I'm quite ready to have them put down, anyhow. Cripples I can do with, just, but I never yet could do with any genius I met, for long. Except you, of course,' he added.

Quentin turned his eyes for a moment, as though he had a passing thought of dealing physically with Harold, but the desire evaporated. He had, of late, grown through such youthful follies. Besides, occasionally Falkland said a thing of use, and he was always a relief from arduous study. He was a very pleasant kind of emissary from the more frivolous quarter of the house. Harold's slim, small form was exquisitely dressed at this moment, for he was going out with his sister shortly, and had only come in since dinner to smoke with Auberon, shield him from Thomas, and submit to instruction at his hands.

'Having brains,' the latter proceeded after a pause, 'Miss Jacoby might have the sense, just conceivably, to

keep clear of her father, however great her feminine instinct for feeding him might be.'

'Drop it,' murmured Harold.

'Not to mention the rat is being fed, presumably, by another female. . . . Oh Lord,' broke out Quentin unexpectedly, 'why are women such fools?'

There was a light tap at the door.

'There's Helena,' said Harold. 'Let's ask her.'

'No, don't,' said Quentin, shifting his pose. 'I mean, I'd rather you didn't, just now.'

'She's always ready to argue,' said Harold, rising: but he added—'Right,'—as he passed his friend, for he saw the point. Helena was going out to enjoy herself, and it was undoubtedly rather a nasty story. Not but what Helena could stand the worst things. She visited hospital wards for incurable children, which had always seemed to Harold one of the worst things in the world. Still, as he opened Auberon's door to her now, in all her young brilliancy, clad in shimmering white and gold, and radiant with happiness in prospect, he felt that Auberon was right as always, and it was not the moment for depressing subjects.

'Come in, won't you?' said Quentin, on his feet. 'I say, we are frightfully smoky here.' He flung up a window one-handed, for Miss Falkland was not the type of young lady who minded draughts.

She did come in for a moment. She never invaded Quentin's working-quarters for long. Helena had a strong sense of the tacit compact that had brought him to inhabit them originally; and the heaviest responsibility for guarding his privacy devolved, she considered, upon herself. Quentin himself had no idea how much of the quiet and comfort he enjoyed he owed to her.

'My word,' said Harold. 'Is that the latest?' He alluded to his sister's toilette, as to which things he held himself a judge.

'No, the last but three,' said Helena, crushing him.

'Well, it's been titivated, then,' said Harold. 'What you call done up.'

'You're extremely clever,' said Helena. 'The flounce has been mended, where you tore it in the carriage door; and I got a new sash with tails, to cover up the mend.' She added for his consolation, as she drew her cloak about her,—'Dance-frocks are sure to get torn, anyhow: and in a crush, no one sees.'

'There isn't anyone special to-night, then,' said Harold, looking intelligent. 'I began to think, when you were so long over dressing, that there might be. . . . Look here, Helena.' He took her arm in his wiliest manner. 'What's little Mrs. Ingestre like? Is she a decent sort of body, in common life? Auberon wants to know.'

Helena blushed, and drew back a little, surprised. She did not answer for a second, and during that instant, Harold's eyes shot to her face. Harold piqued himself on being 'on the spot' in daily life. He was sure that he alone of the family took note of the fact that Helena blushed when Ingestre's name was mentioned.

'She is very nice,' said Helena. 'Rather quiet. I thought Mr. Auberon had seen her.'

'He didn't get very far at first acquaintance,' said Harold. 'Especially as the Mater's tactful methods brought out all Mrs. Ingestre's worst side.'

'I never said that,' exclaimed Quentin.

'No, but you can't deny it happened,' said Harold. 'Now, everybody has a good side as well as a bad one, haven't they, Helena? And you seem to come across the family most.' He glanced at her again. 'Auberon there is fighting shy of facing her,—and longing to ask you to undertake his business.'

'Nothing of the sort,' said Quentin, in answer to Helena's look. 'I shouldn't think of it.'

His tone was vexed, chiefly because Harold had hit the mark again, and it would have been infinite relief to shift Miss Jill Jacoby's business to Miss Falkland's far from

incapable hands. But also because it was evident Harold was teasing, and he did not see why Helena should be teased, nor what ground there could be for such a proceeding.

'Of course, if I could do anything——' she said shyly, her direct and limpid eyes on his.

'You couldn't,' said Quentin, returning the look.

'Hark at him,' scoffed Harold. 'Once he's touched a thing, no one can do anything but himself. If he undertook in a rash moment to order you a petticoat, Helena, he'd go through with it to the bitter end.'

'Well, I am sure it would be a very nice petticoat,' said Helena. 'Well-made,—and well-paid, too: he'd think of the poor work-girls. I'd rather trust him than you. Yours would be cheap and rusty,—showy,—shot-silk,—yes, it would! Don't mind him, Mr. Auberon, I'm carrying him off. Good night.'

III

Mrs. Ingestre's letter, asking Quentin to her husband's 'little gathering of friends' on the last Sunday of April, crossed with one from him to her, mentioning private business, and enquiring if he could call.

Ursula was surprised by the request, and rather gratified. She had liked Quentin, though she showed little of the liking at the time, and spoke of him lightly to her husband. His manner during Mrs. Falkland's diplomatic visit, to his hostess's experienced eye, had been exactly right. He had not been in an easy position on that occasion, but he had done nothing with dignity and competence. Beyond that again, he had affected Ursula sentimentally. He was the type, precisely, which had been the ideal of her first girlhood. He belonged by all his traditions to the Anglo-Indian community she liked and understood. Without being himself military, he had the military cast, well-brushed and straight-backed, self-reliant and restful,—the ideal of fifty out of a hundred English girls. He was

attentive and respectful to her—unlike John. Ursula, in the court of her girlhood, had been used to being upheld and consulted, since she was an eldest-born. As a girl she had 'liked boys,' and been a 'good hand with them,' and later she continued in the same way to invite their confidence. With a sentimentalist of twenty, this is pleasant enough: over thirty it grows suspect rather. The Ingestres, who had violent passions, but were not sentimentalists, disliked and suspected the tendency. Johnny himself sneered faintly at Ursula's 'acolytes,' as he called them, charitable or otherwise, but he was more tolerant of them, on the whole, than his relations. He even condescended to tease them, at times. Live and let live, was Johnny's theory, and granted the 'rough-haired' amused Ursula, they did not hurt him. He was a little surprised at her taste, that was all.

On the morning when Quentin called, John happened to be present passingly, and took his measure. Quentin had no idea he would be regarded at once as one of a gang; he was not accustomed to regard himself like that, and his bearing and behaviour did not match any such modest supposition. John remarked the difference. He was neither the sleek acolyte, to look upon, nor was he 'rough-haired,'—he was rather a new type. Johnny wondered what he was doing with Ursula, and tried to find out, at the expense of considerable ingenuity. He made Ursula coldly furious, by his untimely interest in her proceedings, but he produced no effect on Quentin at all. Finding a man present, he put off his business with Mrs. Ingestre, and talked politics. Quentin's political views were directly opposed to John's, and he expressed them well. On two occasions he refrained from putting his host and elder right, with such a visible effort of courtesy, that Johnny acutely inferred he must be wrong. As he had been talking rather in the air, even to his own consciousness, this was not surprising; but the fact of being wrong annoyed him, and he went away to look up the authorities.

When he was gone, Ursula apologised for him indirectly. Quentin wished earnestly she would not do this,—it was just what had vexed his soul before, when she talked to Mrs. Falkland. The pair were husband and wife, that was enough for him. Added to which, there was no need for apology on her part. Her husband had disturbed nothing to matter, and he had said, even in that short time, several good things. Two of these, both paradoxes that would hardly bear investigation, and both personal to those in high places, Quentin had stored up, determining to use them again if he got a chance. He only regretted he had left the Oxford clubs, where they could have been launched in public to most advantage. Nowadays, caught under the sober wing of the Civil Service, he had to go more heedfully in what he said. John, whose father and grandfather had moved in high, almost heavenly circles of political society, ought to have gone more heedfully still: only he did not.

‘How is Miss Falkland?’ said Ursula to her visitor, giving him, by her gracious smile, an inward start. But, casting his mind backward, he saw the case immediately. It was Mrs. Falkland’s fault,—she would go on, he supposed, letting him in for these misunderstandings. It was trying, but all in the day’s work. It seems, in this world, that at twenty-four years old, and with no marked disadvantages, one cannot get entirely free of girls, gossip, and such-like. Quentin was philosophical.

‘She seems all right,’ he said calmly. ‘She has been to seventeen parties this week, her brother told me. You have to be fairly fit, I should think, to stand that.’

‘Youth,’ laughed Ursula. ‘Don’t you go with her?’

‘Not generally,’ said Quentin. ‘Unless they specially ask me, or unless for any reason her brother can’t.’ He considered a minute. ‘I’ve no right to be still on their premises, really, only Mrs. Falkland’s so jolly kind. They only offered originally to harbour me, while I coaled up for an examination. Now that’s all done.’

'Really?' said Ursula, in her cool way, as though she accepted the statement of facts, but reserved her judgment on them. She had, of course, 'placed' Quentin, with regard to Helena, just in the manner Mrs. Falkland wished. Ladies, even as unwise as Mrs. Falkland, can convey these fine impressions easily,—particularly when the other party is willing to be persuaded of the fact. It happened to be convenient to Ursula to believe Mrs. Falkland's daughter, that popular young beauty, definitely destined, if not already engaged. And since she welcomed the idea, no apparent indifference on Quentin's side was to shake it, at present.

She talked, chattered to Quentin almost: with persistence, as though for relief, and he answered willingly. Presently, being treated in so friendly a spirit, he took his plunge.

'Mrs. Ingestre, I hope you don't mind my bothering you. The fact is, I've been commissioned by my aunt to enquire into a case she's interested in. Do you know a Miss Jacoby?'

'Jacoby?' Ursula considered, a wrinkle of business in her brow. 'Yes, to be sure. She came to me last week about a situation. In some distress, wasn't she? Where's my book?'

She rose and went to her writing-table, composed and competent of aspect. Inwardly she was vexed, as she did not want to talk business with Quentin. Business was a background to her rare pleasures, and she had hoped he would prove a pleasure simply. One has to bear these disappointments, though: and Ursula was disappointed with dignity.

'It's rather a distressful case,' said Quentin: and proceeded to tell her, with the greatest confidence and simplicity, all about it. He had not a moment's scruple in so doing, backed by his aunt's advice. Ursula listened to Jill's history in silence, her finger in her book of notes. She had taken notes of Jill for the society, and now she supple-

mented them cautiously. The fact that Jill's mother had taught in the same establishment as Quentin's aunt aroused her first comment.

'Do you mean she is a lady?' she asked.

'A lady?' said Quentin, brought up short. 'Oh, yes.'

'Excuse me, I used the word technically, we have to. My work for girls falls into two classes, chiefly depending upon that.'

'Well,' said Quentin, 'you can take it from me she is.'

'You mean, I ought to know,' said Ursula. 'But it's not so easy. Wait till you've been deceived as often as I have, by a good manner. I had an impression from what the girl said, that she belonged to theatrical people, or at least had lived among them abroad. They always speak so well, it's hard to be sure, not to mention she's a foreign accent. I gathered she was respectable,' she added, nervously patting her hair. 'I did not mean that for a moment. I was rather sorry for her.'

'Yes?' said Quentin expectantly.

'But as for her being a lady born, I admit it did not occur to me. I may have done wrong in consequence, and I shall have to explain to your aunt. She is too young to be a teacher, as she proposed: she looks a child. The stage, of course, is out of the question, I stopped all idea of that at once. There are few posts for companions going: and for secretary in these days you must be qualified, though breeding's of no importance.'

'Of course,' said Quentin.

'It's a Miss Darcy I sent her to,' said Ursula. 'The Honourable,—very good family, though eccentric, with a little flat. The girl seems to suit her, at least she has not complained; and as she has complained within the first week of everyone I have recommended her till now, I was rather pleased about it.'

'It's awfully kind of you,' said Quentin. He felt there was something coming still.

'The girl said she could work with her hands, and would be glad even of a modest salary : so, as we had this particularly nice post going in a good house, I offered to recommend her, on the strength of your aunt's name.' A short pause. 'But it is domestic service, no more,' said Ursula. 'A general servant.'

Quentin moved and blushed. 'A servant?' he said. Mrs. Ingestre dropped her book of notes, and sat down again near him.

'There is nothing shameful in domestic service,' she said, smiling, 'especially nowadays. I often tell John we shall all come to it in time, if servants go on being the trouble they are. I might say I am in domestic service myself.' Ursula leant back in her velvet chair, and folded her white hands in her lap.

'No, really,' said Quentin, protesting.

'I assure you I am, and I only wish I had Miss Jacoby's freedom. She has a very easy time of it really. An old spinster lady, with methodical ways and regular habits, is far easier to look after, I can tell you, than a man.'

Since she would adopt this personal line, Mr. Auberon determined to argue it.

'But you have servants of your own to help,' he said.

'That makes more work, not less,' said Ursula. 'Ask my mother-in-law, who has three houses, and a permanent staff of five-and-twenty people.'

'Five-and-twenty! I say!' murmured Quentin. He pondered the ordainment of so large a mass of humanity for a moment,—it had never struck him that women had chances such as this. He even wondered if Mrs. Ingestre was exaggerating, or jesting : her expression gave him no clue. 'Wouldn't it be fun rather?' he cautiously said.

'It will not,' said Ursula. She examined her fine hand, and the rings upon it. 'I shall have them, of course, in my turn. We are wandering from the subject, Mr. Auberon. I can give you Miss Jacoby's address, of course, but if you are proposing to see her——'

'Well?' he queried, as she stopped.

'I shouldn't, that's all: considering the peculiarities of Miss Darcy, and the terms on which the girl was engaged.'

'What are the peculiarities of Miss Darcy?'

'Extremely fussy, poor old thing,—a bundle of nerves. She's half an invalid into the bargain. You could write, of course, if there's anything you wish to say: only I give you my word the girl's in good hands, no need to trouble further. I'll answer to your aunt.'

Ursula saw herself on her customary platform, directing and counselling youth. She adopted this tone alternately with the other more playful one, being still at the stage of experiment with this new 'acolyte' of hers. He was so attentive and docile in appearance, that she had no idea but that he would fall in with all she proposed. She was the more surprised when, after looking before him for a moment, he remarked—'I'm afraid I must go.'

'Must?' said Ursula, lifting her brows. •

'Yes. You see, my aunt wrote to me yesterday from Geneva,—she stopped there going through. She meant to go straight on south, but she didn't,—she waited four days. She found the poor woman—this girl's mother—was dying, that was all. She couldn't leave her at that point, so she stayed till the end.'

'It was extremely kind of her——' began Ursula.

'No, it wasn't,—excuse me,—she had known her pretty well, in youth, you see, and Mrs. Jacoby had no other English friends. She had learnt about her husband's behaviour too,—plenty of people to tell her that, of course. To turn your back on a person in that state—a country-woman—who was being squeezed out of existence by sheer bad luck——'

'It was her own fault,' said Ursula calmly.

'Granted,' he returned, with almost startling dryness, and paused anew. 'Anyhow one thing's clear, that I must take the letter round to the kid, give her the news. That's the first thing.'

'I will do so, if you like,' said Ursula. 'Or you could send the letter.'

'Thanks,' he returned, with perfect obstinacy. 'I can't let things slide any longer.'

'I didn't propose that you should,' observed Ursula demurely.

'No.' He glanced at her. 'I believe I'm being beastly rude,' he said, awaking slightly. 'But it's a pretty rotten affair, taken altogether, and I've been worrying at it a good deal. Nothing to be made of it, you'd say,—and yet—there may be, don't you see. I'd like to reckon the chances. I've got to, as a fact, since I was left in charge. I've had about enough at second-hand.'

Ursula, who could hardly make him out, did not reply.

'Eternal reports,' pursued Quentin reflectively, 'getting round corners, through meanings, discounting people's statements, discarding rot. I get sick of that in the end.'

'Thank you!' laughed Ursula.

'I'm beastly sorry, Mrs. Ingestre.' His own smile answered hers. 'I'm sorry if I express myself badly, but it's a fact. So long as you're not in touch with people, you can't do much good. You must know that, since I gather you're always doing it.'

'Doing good? I'm not, indeed, Mr. Auberon.'

'Well, wanting to. If you want to deal with a case, I mean to make anything of it, you go and interview the subject, don't you? Of course you consult your committee first,' he appended hastily.

'I don't, invariably,' said Ursula. 'It wastes time.'

'You're laughing at me,' said Quentin. 'Never mind. I'm sure you'd rather not live on reports and—er—conjectures, when you can see with your own eyes.'

'Seeing will not help you much in this case,' observed Ursula. 'That is partly what I meant. The girl's appearance is misleading. Personally, I wouldn't trust her, at least in certain ways.'

Quentin paused momentarily. 'There you are,' he said.

'She misled you,—and consequently I must take your view, and perhaps be doubly misled.'

'Really, Mr. Auberon——'

'But you see what I mean,' he said, obviously arguing with himself, not her. 'Simply because this subject's a little female, I'm supposed to grab you, or my aunt, or Miss Falkland, say, and stick you in front of me. What's more, I've a deadly inclination to do it,—do the conventional,—just as you're inclined to give me the excuse. You've given me three at least while we've been talking. . . . Well, strikes me there are certain contingencies,—such as one's mother being struck off the list of the living, for instance,—that can't be dodged quite in that way. I could send the letter, of course,—only I shan't. I'm going to see her to-morrow.'

'Do you want my permission?' said Ursula. 'I'm not your aunt.'

'No,' said Quentin. He had subsided again after his outburst, and looked a trifle ashamed of himself, but not much. His eyes moved on to Mrs. Ingestre, considering her. She was laughing, and looked nice. 'Perhaps I oughtn't to have said it,' he admitted, 'but you never get an opinion straight until you have stated it: and anyhow, you have been so kind.'

Ursula told herself she did not like him, but she did. She liked him dangerously, almost. She had been trying half-consciously to attract him, but he was not to be beguiled. She felt in him, in some inexplicable way, the upper air. He was considering principles more than persons, facts more than feelings, obviously; really aloof, above small scheming and sensuality, not pretending to be so, like Ursula. It piqued her vanity, of course,—he walked regardless; but that youthful disregard and genuine ignorance of a skilled woman's resources merely stimulated her, where Johnny's overwhelming demand upon her intelligence repelled and stunned. She wished to see more of Quentin, and, secure in her ancient experience

of his type,—quite apart from any individuality he might chance to own,—she laid her plans peacefully and promptly according.

Later Johnny, on the subject of Mr. Auberon, showed unwarrantable curiosity.

‘What did he come for?’ he said at lunch.

‘He came to enquire about a girl,’ said Ursula, prepared in advance for John’s usual jokes. He was interested promptly.

‘Never!’ he ejaculated. ‘Who?’

‘It’s rather a private matter,’ said Ursula. ‘However, I suppose——’

During the next pause, as usual, she tried not to speak, and he obliged her.

‘She’s that girl who studied voice-training in Geneva,’ she said unwillingly, ‘the one I interviewed the other day. I think I mentioned her at the time, but you have probably forgotten.’

‘I haven’t,’ he assured her. ‘I said at the time she’d have done better to come to me. What did you do with her?’

‘I sent her to old Miss Darcy,’ said Ursula.

‘Lord!’ said Johnny, who knew the lady. ‘The bearded Darcy? What did you do that for?’

‘She had a dying mother and a disreputable father,’ said Ursula wearily, ‘and wanted to make money, as usual. I put her in the way of doing so honestly, that’s all.’

‘Kind of you,’ said Johnny, ‘but that’s not my point. Why turn the voice-trainer on to Miss Darcy? To train her not to bark at strangers? She always barks at me.’

‘She looked fairly mild and manageable,’ said Ursula, ‘and I thought they might get on.’

‘Oh, she trains tempers as well, does she? What are her qualifications?’

Ursula told him, and he listened in his fashion, without

at all appearing to attend. 'And what was young Auberon sent for?—let's hear,' he pursued cheerfully.

'I did not send him,' said Ursula, flushing. 'I advised him not to go, but he was rather obstinate. He said he wanted to see her.'

'See?—what's she like?' said Johnny. Before his wife could answer—'Why don't you have the voice-trainer here, and get her to train you?' he said. 'You need it.'

'Thanks,' said Ursula. 'I have voice enough for my purposes.'

'No, you haven't,' said Johnny. 'You can't speak off a platform, and you're always trying to. You're done up after a big dinner,—cross as a cat——'

'Thank you,' said Ursula.

'Sheer exhaustion,' he insisted, 'and all from that. You can't conduct family prayers—not that I've ever heard you, but I'm sure of it. You can't say a word down a telephone, as I've often told you,—that is, I say a word when you do. Grandmamma says, as soon as you really try to speak to her, she stops hearing you. That's a clear proof, and she's a good judge. You can't breathe, for nuts——'

'Perhaps I can't eat,' said Ursula.

'I was just going to say so,' he retorted. 'You can't eat a dry biscuit without choking,—beastly dangerous that. Look here!' He got up, seemingly in earnest. 'If you have that girl here to teach you to speak, and she plays up to it, I'll give her a guinea a lesson. Twelve lessons,—I'll see that you practise,—tell her so.'

With which directions, he departed. Ursula, after short and rather uneasy pondering, found it convenient to believe that he did not mean it. She did not doubt Miss Jacoby's qualifications,—especially as John accepted them,—but she did not want to take lessons from a girl to whom she had been playing patroness. It would look absurd. Besides, John might be a judge of artists, but he had no knowledge of the price women's work commanded

in the market,—he was reckless of such things, utterly. He flung his guineas away on good work wherever found, and refused to look twice at the well-meaning muddler who is the worst perplexity of the benevolent in all communities. That was partly why, even in her public work, Ursula found in him such scant sympathy.

IV

Quentin Auberon saw Jill Jacoby with no difficulty at the house of the bearded Miss Darcy, who barked.

The lady thus described by Johnny was an impecunious and quite harmless old spinster, with an irascible manner and voice that alarmed the unwary, and a tiny well-ordered flat in a West London square, full of unique and beautiful things. Her father had been a collector of note, and she had, in the wreck of his fortunes, preserved some of his treasures in the way of porcelain, bibelots and furniture, being herself a connoisseur.

The Ingestres had links with her in the past, and she was devoted to Johnny's mother, who, since Miss Darcy was practically bedridden, sent her son from time to time to display his own discoveries in the shops and dust-holes of the various capitals, for Johnny was not without a taste that way himself. Miss Darcy, who had wits with all her oddities, amused Johnny: so he seldom acquired any object of the sort without bringing it to her to peer at through her strong spectacles, covet, or more frequently condemn. For her leading theory in the matter was that the people who had the money never had the knowledge necessary to perfect or even to preserve a good collection: and vice versa, naturally

One of these little treasures, an invaluable miniature of a French ancestress, belonging to the Ingestre Hall collection, Miss Darcy had kept so long, on one excuse or another, that it was Johnny's pleasure to say she had stolen

it. He knew it was perfectly safe in her skilled keeping, safer really than at the Hall, and so did his mother ; so the retention of the miniature of the Maréchale caused them no anxiety, and merely remained a permanent joke.

Eccentric Miss Darcy certainly was, and far from prepossessing : but those who got past her ugly exterior soon found that her snapping was largely ill-health, shattered nerves from a life of misfortune, and the intense shyness of a grotesque-looking and sensitive person, often misunderstood, and exiled from her peers. She ' barked ' at Quentin on entering, and listened to his explanations grimly : but she was not the least ill-disposed towards him, and as soon as he had mentioned the Ingestre name, grew friendly. Miss Darcy liked young men,—Johnny had carefully taught her to do so,—and understood their ways and interests more readily than most spinsters. She was also a sure judge of breeding, as her own family was extremely good, and she took Mr. Auberon at his surface value after five minutes' chat, though she drew the dialogue out for her own pleasure a little longer.

Miss Jacoby herself,—unmistakable by her gait,—had let him in, and carried his card to Miss Darcy, while he waited. Then she returned and admitted him straight to the spinster's little drawing-room. Miss Darcy did not dismiss her, and she remained during the space of the first dialogue standing near the door, one hand resting lightly against the wall, not at all as though for support. Quentin was conscious of her eyes upon him the whole time, vividly conscious. Whatever the rat's daughter was, he decided at once, she was not a nonentity.

Indeed, he had gathered that already from his sister and Ursula, though they had only supplied him with two facts about her, and those facts directly opposed. To Ursula she was ' misleading,' and, on sight, untrustworthy. Bridget said ' pukka ' and pitied her. How was a man to reconcile these opposite impressions ?

Both informants were right, in a measure. Jill was

misleading, since it was her proud young pleasure to mislead. She was a mass of contradictions, as what girl of sixteen—especially of mixed race—is not? Even in her outer aspect, impressions clashed. Her contour was childish, yet clearly she was not a child,—she could not be. Jill, the ‘rat’s daughter,’ was of medium size, plump and neatly made. Her lameness was an offence against nature’s graceful intention, consequently she disguised it. Moving softly with that slight pretty lurch, she appeared simply to change from one easy pose to another, the while her disdainful little contained expression challenged the world to find anything wrong. Her smooth dark hair, in the quaint style of Swiss children, was parted from brow to nape, and coiled into braided medallions above her ears. Her forehead was low and broad, her face short like a boy’s. Her eyes were clear brown or hazel, several shades lighter than her hair: wide-set and brilliant, but with an expression of extreme remoteness all the same. Jill seemed always to be watching the proceedings of a private and superior world, with the most derogatory indifference to the society directly beneath her ken. Yet she was, as Miss Darcy betrayed, a practical young person in all that touched the household, and seemed to pride herself on a knowledge of unlovely detail. Her mouth was beautiful alike in shape and colour, rather wide, and in smiling she crinkled her light-brown eyes, and showed a little of her lower teeth through scarcely-parted lips. It was a strange smile, not really mirthful, yet seductive. It seemed reticent, waiting on events to amuse her more. Yet—one more contradiction in Jill—she was an admirable comedian, and made others laugh without difficulty. It may be noted that real comedians can do this without wasting smiles themselves. All Jill’s magic was in her throat, she kept it there quite safely. Her lips, during long watchful silences, lay on guard, as though she knew that by stirring them she could stir the world as well. She pitched her tone low in common life, like the higher

notes of a man's register almost. In rapid speech, or to a large company, it lifted and lightened at once, gathering variety and shade, yet always of the same rare quality. Quentin's little sister, seeking to describe it, called it 'ice-smashing,'—her tone had certainly something of the echo, chill and delicate, of shivered ice. Looking at her queer eyes, and listening to that unearthly tone, it would not be the first instinct to trust Jill, certainly. And yet Bridget had called her 'pukka,' and that was not a judgment Bridget's brother could utterly disregard.

As a fact, a life of continual shock and disappointment had driven the child to assume a mask. Reserve was not in her nature at the start. But from five years old onward, so fast as she grasped any advantage, even the commonest prize of childhood, it broke in her hand. A clever girl, she had learnt just enough to be ashamed of her ignorance. She was fond of her mother, but had had to spend her time in repairing her mother's mistakes. Every illusion about her father had vanished perforce before she reached ten years old. Her own fierce ambition, constantly fed by flattery from both parents, had dropped between the two. Every step she had tried to make on her own account, her father had forestalled and frustrated. Her mother's more clinging indulgence dragged her constantly back to the hearth, where she could at least feel she was wanted, when the world rebuffed. She could have made her own life, had she been left alone; but the too visible failure of others dogged her. No one believed in her claims with those appendages. So Jill with the obstinacy of childhood gave it up, and found pleasure in the other extreme of abnegation and self-devoted servitude. Until—inevitable result in a passionate nature—at fifteen she had become self-centred utterly, a little miser, revelling in secret over the treasure she never intended to show: keeping the world of her dreaming and desire apart, locked in herself, and within the pages of one precious book, her 'Journal,'—a wonderful and terrible record—to which she confided

her sensuous, stormy thoughts when they would no longer be restricted ; living on herself alone : and meeting all the world with that low contained utterance and inscrutable smile, to such purpose that only the straightest and kindest and simplest souls of her own sex—like Bridget—understood her.

Jill looked now at the young man, her employer's visitor, with her strange eyes. He had really come to see her, not Miss Darcy,—he said so. She knew something about him,—she had heard his name before. Both his names, what was more, since both had been at the foot of that letter—most severe and strange to Jill's understanding—that he had once written from Oxford to her father. It happened that she had given her father a few hints for the other letter that provoked it,—she was badly in need of money for the house, and saw no harm. The extreme cleverness of the begging-letter to Bridget had been largely owing to Jill. Why not ? Miss Auberon was a rich and comfortable girl, and might as well serve her. The reply from Quentin was, consequently, in part her property, and she took it away and studied it in concealment. She learnt it by heart,—instantly, for her memory was remarkable. She tried once or twice to imitate the little English hand. Beyond its being a young man's letter, its being English was the chief charm. An exile almost from her birth, Jill called herself English, and had learnt her mother's language with care. Also, since her mother owned a few classical works, all her most exciting reading had been in that tongue. England was the land of high romance. She knew Shakespeare, she knew Dickens, and she knew Scott,—few English girls of fifteen can say as much. There was a Quentin on Scott's pages, young and English and rather cool, unlike the Frenchmen,—much like this. She gazed at him. He was probably a hero, or at least he might easily be made so, as soon as Jill and the journal had really taken him in hand. She prepared an enthralling commentary for the

journal, while she waited, graceful but secretly weary, at Miss Darcy's door.

Then he turned to her, brusquely rather, and handed her some flowers he had been holding in his left hand all the time: country flowers from his sister's cottage in Gloucestershire, where he had been spending the week-end. His kind little sister, knowing the bad news he carried, had picked them for Jill, on an impulse, to console her; but he did not say so, for he did not think it necessary. To his surprise the haughty Miss Jacoby winced at his movement, and blushed, looking towards her employer doubtfully.

'Certainly,' snapped that personage. 'Go and put them in water. I'll send Mr. Auberon to see you in the kitchen, presently.'

'Perhaps,' said Quentin, addressing Jill for the first time directly, 'I had better give you this before you go.'

He extended a letter in a soft foreign envelope, with the Geneva stamp, directed in his aunt's clear hand. Jill guessed the news at once, as was evident: the colour sank from her face, her lips pressed together, and he saw the movement of swallowing in her delicate throat. Then all her mask of indifference returned, and with a little shrug, she slipped it from his hand. Her retreat with it and the flowers was so swift and soft, that even such a keen witness as Quentin found it hard to believe she was lame at all.

'She's too pretty,' Miss Darcy was saying, when he recovered from the contrary shock of all these preliminary impressions. 'It won't do. I can't have a pretty girl about me. Tell Ursula Ingestre, if you come from her, it won't do any better than the last.'

'Pretty?' said Quentin. It certainly had not struck him that she was.

'Too much for the place. This isn't her place at all. How can I see to her, tied like this? I can't,—Ursula's absurd. Cripple? Nonsense, I have crutches,—that's

her art. She's as pretty as she wants to be, the child. Look there, I tried her at that wheel last night.' She pointed to a black oak spinning-wheel, that figured among her curiosities. 'I used to spin myself,—thought I could teach her,—well, I could not. I looked at her instead. She charmed me. . . . Well, she'll charm the butcher and the baker,—I have to send her out. It'll all be over in no time. I can't have her here.'

She was really intensely nervous and concerned about it, Quentin could see; her rheumatic hands were working on the arm of her chair.

'Can't you keep her a little?' he asked rather shyly. 'She's got no friends. My aunt is in Italy for the present. She'll see to her when she comes home.'

'No friends? She's too many! They'll all be her friends, and more, before I can stop 'em. She's too young to manage herself,—I'm too old,' said Miss Darcy, 'to have a child. What's her origin, tell me.' She snapped at him. Quentin told her.

'Gentry? That? Nonsense,—what's the butcher-boy like her for? She's a wild thing, I tell you, wild as grass. I may talk to her, she looks round me all the time. Oh, I ought to know that kind,—she'll never settle. She's in love already, for all I know.'

Quentin coloured and was silent. He began to think her a little mad,—perhaps a form of monomania. Yet he could not but feel how her view supported Ursula rather than Bridget, in the matter of Miss Jill's peculiarities.

'Well?' she snapped anxiously.

'She can't be that,—I mean, she's not old enough. Really,' said Quentin, 'you mustn't bother so much about her.'

'You think I'm a silly old woman, don't you?—silly and weak. But you're a nice young man, proper-brought-up. You know nothing of it. Johnny would know, you ask him,—it's another kind. She'll be in and out of love for the next ten years. I can't under-

take it, I've got her on the nerves. You must tell Ursula, promise me.'

Quentin promised.

'Saddle me with a limping mystery like that !' exclaimed Miss Darcy : but his promise and his tranquil manner seemed to soothe her, and by degrees, she settled down.

'She's lost her mother,' said Quentin, then. 'That letter I gave her had the news.'

'Her mother?' Miss Darcy sat rigid a minute. 'Oh poor child,—poor child.' She put a shaking hand on his knee. 'Yes,—well, I must keep her a bit. Don't tell Ursula at present, she'd make a fuss. . . . Her mother,—ah, dear ! Poor little thing.'

After a minute, still shaking with the new emotion, she signed him to go.

He went, secretly setting his teeth.

It would be unfair to say he was prejudiced from the outset, though certainly his informants had not done their best to reassure him. But without any predisposition of any kind, his nature must have dreaded hers. Jill might call herself English, but she had the soul of the east of Europe, ardent, even rapacious a little. Her age, granted that parentage, was an ungovernable age, and reckless of consequences. Such feeble moral teaching as her mother had been able to offer had trickled off her almost as soon as spoken. Those ideas were pretty enough, but beside the point. It was not likely, on the face of it, that a girl so disposed would submit to constitutional development at Mr. Auberon's hands, or even to direction, when one came to think. Perhaps Quentin guessed it, being a clever boy, and that was why he was afraid of her.

He did not exhibit apprehension, naturally. He was kind, simply kind and careful, as man must be to an afflicted little girl. He thought of her steadily as a little girl, determined so to envisage her. He offered her what

consolation he could think of, his ready countenance in her efforts for independence, his company (more important to Jill) for quite a time in her kitchen solitude,—and, of course, his advice. Her passion of grief for her mother touched him, though it puzzled him too. It was illogical : since she had been most willing to leave her mother, he gathered : and had by no means welcomed the chance, offered her by Miss Havant, of going back.

So they started at cross purposes. For Jill was sure, even while feeling quite considerably, that her sorrow was moving him in her interest ; and Quentin, though reproaching himself, was questioning all the time whether her sorrow were real at all. It was real, most of it : Jill was a good daughter, and had worked for her mother all her life ; though, when the chance of escape from that caged life came, her ambition proved stronger than her love. Once flown, she could not wish to go back, her wings had long been beating for freedom. Had Quentin had an inkling of her wretched home conditions, the drudge's life she had led in her feckless parents' service, he would have understood better the wild romance that liberty and London was. Even at this moment of grief for her mother, life opened a little more before her,—she was less tied. She now had money of her own,—Miss Darcy paid her, which she had not the least expected at first. She had only to save for herself, and the world was hers,—only of course she disclosed none of these leaping ambitions : she simply plotted and watched, and made use of all that came to further them, hasten the great day. Miss Darcy herself Jill regarded as a tool ; she had been trying little experiments, and thought she saw how an influence might be gained. The house was nothing,—Jill agreed with Ursula ; a *ménage* of one old lady—she who had had in the best days ten *pensionnaires* to cater for!—could be looked after with one hand. Best of all, here was the man,—*the* man she had always dreamed of,—come to help. She was certain, convinced he must help her, if she could but

be pathetic enough. So she began by being pathetic as a new-made orphan, with the best excuse: and it must be owned she did it convincingly, and in excellent taste.

She sat in a delightful attitude against the wooden kitchen table, with the nicely-cleaned ranks of her pots and pans as a background, against the wall. It was a pose for Cinderella in a fairy-tale scene, both little rounded arms leaning on the board, one propping her head, her elbow in the other palm. She had the little supple long-fingered hands of the artist, brownish-white, no finger of them ever out of place. With her round childish brow so inclined, the charming continuous line of head and neck the quaint South German coiffure permitted was seen to the best advantage. It was a good head, Quentin noted, and he had no doubt of the brains within. Had there only been brains to reckon with! And yet she looked very young, her mouth's line very melancholy, and seeing it he was sorry for her.

She used her lowest, most seductive nightingale tone to answer his questions, and she answered neatly and to the point. She rarely looked towards him, and when she did seemed to look beyond. The little witch knew the value of all her resources, had played with and practised them all: practised alone chiefly, it is true, she had had small chance of practising on others, in her scheming life of poverty.

'My father,—I must let him know,' she murmured.

'I will let him know,' said Quentin.

'You?' A wondering glance.

'Of course. You need not think about anything of that sort just now. Has he let you alone so far?'

'Yes,' said Jill pensively. 'I said he was not to come near me.'

'Good,' thought Quentin, noting the change of her expressive mouth. 'She's got him in hand, I shouldn't wonder.' Aloud he said—'Will he go back to Switzerland, do you think, when he hears this news?'

She drew a breath. 'He might,' she said. 'There will be something for him.'

'Pickings,' said Quentin: and nothing in the world could have kept the edge of scorn from his tone. As Jill sent him a sidelong glance, slightly curious, he said, 'Would you be glad if he went?' She shrugged simply, lifting her fine little brows. 'Do you care for him?' he pressed her keenly.

'No,' said Jill, having considered. 'I cannot: I have tried. I was sorry for him once, but even that now is finished. He has killed my mother,—yes, certainly it is he that has killed her out there.' She reflected another minute. 'So,' she concluded with satisfaction, clasping her elbow again, 'he is not my father any more.'

Quentin was only too glad to believe it. He had little doubt, of course, that young as she was she knew the whole disgraceful history. She must have seen too much to be ignorant.

'If he wishes to be my father,' Jill resumed unexpectedly, 'I shall tell him I have enough.' She shrugged. '*Qu'il se tire d'affaire—sans moi.*' She drew pictures on the table with her finger for a moment, and he saw the tears on her long lashes, not yet dried. 'I told Miss Darcy he was dead,' she added.

'That was a lie,' remarked Quentin.

'Yes. But I had to tell her something,—Mrs.—that lady told her nothing at all. After all, one has a father.' Her tone became dreamy again.

'Well,' said Quentin, 'Mrs. Ingestre knows best.' Privately, he wondered that Ursula should have kept Miss Darcy in the dark,—consideration for Miss Darcy's nerves, probably, or the idea that she might have rejected the girl had she known: or perhaps merely Mrs. Ingestre's own beautiful propriety, which had been slightly too apparent in their interview. Personally, Quentin would have told the employer, if only to get the thing off his chest. However, Mrs. Ingestre had the experience, and he

had to leave it between the two ladies, old friends as they were. Quentin supposed they were friends because Miss Darcy spoke of Mrs. Ingestre's husband so familiarly : that it might not follow, he forgot.

There was yet another point he had to make sure of before he left her.

'Are you communicating with your father?' he asked, eyes cast down, as he noted Jacoby's London address.

'Communicating?' She coloured.

'Sending him money.'

'Once, I did.'

'You must not,' he said crisply. 'The money you earn is yours. We will see to your father's needs, if he has them. . . . Have you a place to keep it,—your money, I mean?'

'She would keep it for me,' said Jill, looking aside and shrinking rather. On this subject he alarmed her; she feared the interference of Man, with his large standards of the outer world, in her small and careful contriving.

'Miss Darcy? Yes, that would be best. She's kind to you?'

'Yes. . . . I wish she was not so ugly,' said Jill.

Quentin laughed. 'I suppose you can't offer to shave her exactly, can you?' he said, rising, and pocketing the note he had made.

Jill shadowed a smile too, warily, in her fashion. She had risen when he did, but, hand on table, did not stir from where she stood. It reminded him, and his gravity returned as he asked—

'You don't find the work too tiring,—the stairs and so on? I suppose you are pretty constantly on your feet?'

'All the time,' said Jill disdainfully. 'But it does not tire me,—I am strong.'

'I meant——'

'My infirmity.' She smiled her strange little smile again. 'It is not beautiful, but it is a small thing. Other people regard it, but I do not.'

Being so held off, Quentin submitted. 'Miss Darcy is worse off than you are, certainly,' he said. 'Well, I say, I've got to go.'

'You are going?'

'Yes. I don't want to lose sight of you, though.' He reflected rapidly. 'Look here, is Miss Darcy going to the Ingestres' on Sunday, by any chance?'

'Yes,—I saw the card. Oh, will you be there?' said Jill.

'I'm asked, yes. Make her bring you, can't you? She would, I expect, at a hint. Then I might get a chance to introduce you to Miss Falkland. I should like to do that.'

'Miss Falkland?'

'Yes. Didn't my sister mention I lived with them?'

He explained, lightly and curtly, since he was late. Having explained, he went, also briskly and lightly, thankful for duty accomplished. To his own critical mind, he had left nothing undone; and said nothing superfluous, in that well-studied interview. But the princess Cinderella, left in the kitchen, with her beautiful mouth set sulkily, and her strange light-brown eyes glittering above, could not agree with him. She could very well have dispensed with Miss Falkland's name.

V

Ursula had decided, for all the bitterness the discussion of John's party for Helena entailed in private, to treat it gracefully, in front of her own friends, as a joke. So she laughingly disclaimed all responsibility for the arrangements, in advance.

'This play's going to be as I like it,' explained Johnny, also in advance, adapting his wit to his company.

'I hope you don't mean to rag it,' said Ursula, in front of the friends. 'It is Shakespeare, after all, and a very pretty one. And it will be extremely hard on the poor girl, if you do.'

Johnny merely lifted his brows. That it is simply

impossible to rag Shakespeare, however one may talk about him up to the very minute of performance, she did not seem to know. But then she knew nothing. Nor did her friends. Johnny left it.

'I suppose it will be in your room, Mr. Ingestre,' said the friends, with the amusement that subject always seemed to evoke.

Johnny could never think why. His music-room at the back of the house was a particularly jolly place, a billiard-room in origin, furnished entirely in his own taste, and to suit his private purposes. It boasted a large piano, and a small stage. The chairs were better than any chairs Ursula could ever have invented, still less unearthed in London. There were a great many things of interest, of a mixed kind, valuable and otherwise, with dark histories attached to them which only Johnny could tell. Most of the music-room's contents were mellow with time, and they would all have been hoary with dust likewise, only Ursula and her housemaids made periodic incursions and cleaned in the corners while Johnny was out. They seldom succeeded completely before he sent them packing, that was his consolation; nor could air and water ever remove the strong, supporting savour of tobacco that clung to everything, and helped his Sunday visitors to feel at home. Why women laughed at this sanctuary of art and friendship, remained a mystery: but even the most well-trained women, such as Violet, did.

Since Johnny always worked in his room, at whichever of his arts happened to be uppermost, Helena learnt to know it too. She thought it funny, but like him, privately. She was infinitely more at ease there than in Ursula's department, where she was simply guest, not pupil. In Johnny's haunts she became pupil instantly, for some reason,—how it happened she could not say. Nor did he show himself an easy master; she had never worked so hard in her life, as he made her work, those weeks before performance; she learned what artistic working meant.

She went and came, graceful and serene, crossing from one department of that strange house to the other, as they wished her : independent, since her mother trusted her readily to Ursula's charge, her manners perfect to both host and hostess, however they chose to treat her. Since she was gentle, Ursula patronised her easily ; since she was adroit under her modest guise, she very nearly succeeded in constituting the link Ursula needed so sorely with her husband. She was able at least to keep their tempers for them ; and both were secretly relieved if they could detain her, after rehearsal, for a meal.

In his professional capacity, John had been most considerate of Helena's feelings, and contained his opinions to her face with unusual success. But he told Ursula cheerfully, after the first trial, that she recited prettily, but acted like a mincing missy ; and after the second, that she was rather worse, because she was trying to be hearty. A hearty Rosalind, said Johnny, was obviously beastly, and she had far better go back to the mincing one, which only made the hearer smile, not swear.

So uncompromising had been his private views, clearly expressed to Ursula, and kindly concealed by her from Helena's family, that she was rather surprised when, on the day of performance, Miss Falkland appeared beautifully dressed in character, composed as usual, with no uncomfortable nerves apparent to distract her patrons beforehand ; and acted the ' pretty play ' ' quite charmingly ' : at least, that was the opinion of Ursula's contingent at the end of the pretty play, with one accord.

' What did you tell me she wasn't going to dress for ? ' said Ursula to her husband, rather annoyed, when the earliest guests were arriving, and Miss Falkland, a cloak over her court-ropes, and its hood over her glorious hair, had just appeared.

' I told her she could, last night,' said Johnny carelessly, ' since it seemed she had the clothes. I thought it might be the best chance.'

'Of course it is,' said Ursula. 'I said so, from the first.' She looked markedly at her husband's suit of unseemly tweed: for he had spent the morning on the links as usual, and had not troubled to change.

'The only hope now is to knock 'em in the eye,' he pursued calmly. 'They may see her way to a dolly part in a dolly piece if she looks nice enough,—Lord knows. Luckily she does know how to dress,—I'd begun to doubt even that.'

'She's quite lovely,' said Ursula, who grew warmer towards Helena in proportion as Johnny waxed critical. 'Isn't she, Mr. Auberon? That satin is just the perfect shade.'

Johnny reviewed Rosalind's clothes a moment in his 'dissecting' manner. Critical was the mildest word for that manner of his.

'I told her to keep her hair, and send the text to blazes,' he remarked, to Miss Darcy who sat near him. 'I told her the author would agree if he were here. "Your chestnut's ever the only colour"—which reminds me—' he swung suddenly about. 'Where's Celia?'

'Who was to do Celia?' said Miss Darcy, who seemed most contented at his side. She became extremely natural and composed in Johnny's restless company. But then she had a passionate prejudice in favour of all Ingestres, and had known Johnny himself literally from the cradle, since she had been his mother's confidante and companion at that time. She knew the atmosphere of the music-room on Sunday extremely well, having a permanent invitation to anything that happened there: and was aware that if one exerted patience through the somewhat heterogeneous preliminaries, one was generally rewarded by something good in the end.

'Mitchell said he'd bring one of his kids along to do it for me,' confided Johnny, searching the rapidly filling room. 'But I see no kid, do you? Of course Mitchell may call her a kid, and she be twenty-five. He's been married several times. Monty!'

He vociferated suddenly, across the heads of several of Ursula's nice acquaintance, who tried not to look surprised. Quite at the other extremity of the room, a keen-looking tall man, rather high-coloured, and conspicuously well-dressed, turned about.

'Where's that kid you promised, you thief?' called Johnny.

'Apologise, Ingestre,' said the man, in the unmistakable clear-consonanted actor's tone. 'The child's had a bit of a cold, and Fanny won't allow her to speak through it.'

'What rot,' said Johnny, on the same pleasant carrying note. 'Fanny, are you getting fussy in your old age?'

'She's at the ticklish point,' Mr. Mitchell continued, as the lady addressed, who was talking low and rapidly to her neighbour, did not seem to hear. 'We'd sooner not take risks.'

'You don't seem to think of me,' complained Johnny. 'Celia's not so easy done without. Serve Fanny right if you made her take it—tell her so.'

'Johnny's inviting you to take Celia,' said Mr. Mitchell to his inattentive lady. 'You might acknowledge the compliment.'

'I will, if you like, Johnny,' said Mrs. Mitchell, turning a beautiful worn face and a tired smile. 'Anything to oblige a friend.'

'Rot, I was joking,' said John in some haste. Crossing to the door, he laid a hand on the actress's shoulder, as he passed her. 'If you'd go through one of the third-act dialogues with me, at the end, to show her—' he mentioned quietly.

'That I will,' said Fanny, also quietly, only unfortunately everybody heard. 'It's some time since I made love to you, my dear, when I come to think.' She put her gloved hand over his fingers with frank affection, before he moved away.

This, and more, was the kind of thing Ursula was expected to bear, that day. They all seemed to be on the

most confidential terms with her husband, and with one another; and their confidences, low or loud, were invariably audible. Yet Ursula bore it marvellously, with the right smiles and movements for Johnny's friends, and the face of martyrdom turned to her own. It was a beautiful exhibition, so all the latter agreed, of wifely tolerance.

'Good, there's my father,' said Johnny, after another easy interval, during which everybody enjoyed themselves immensely, and nothing occurred. 'He said he'd read the Dukes.'

'Both the Dukes?' asked somebody.

'Any quantity of Dukes, my father says he's up to. Now we're pretty straight, I think.' The stage-manager, sitting on a table amid his friends, glanced about him.

'Who's Celia, finally?' asked the last speaker.

'I am, Edward,' said Johnny. 'I'm three males and a female, now, with Jaques. I'm rather out of practice in ventriloquism,—hope I keep them clear.'

'Jaques?' queried Edward. 'But you're Orlando, aren't you?'

'Rather!' said Johnny.

'I say, Ingestre,' said Edward, 'do you propose to conduct a dialogue with yourself?'

'Rather,' said Johnny, unperturbed. 'It's a thing I'm specially good at doing—in the evenings—ask my wife.'

'John,' said Ursula's cool tone across his shoulder, at this point. 'Here's Miss Jacoby will take Celia, if you like.'

'Who the deuce is Miss Jacoby?' said Johnny under his breath. 'And what's she got to do with it?'

'She is close to you,' said Ursula quietly: and scored for once, for he recoiled. Then he rose.

'It is as you wish,' said Jill, with great indifference. She treated Mr. Ingestre the aristocrat to rather more haughtiness than she had treated Quentin at first meeting—hardly worth while to look at him, one would have said. She was leaning, inconspicuously as usual, against the table; for, as Miss Darcy's maid, she could not venture to sit down.

'Awfully good of you, Miss Jacoby,' said Johnny, taking her in with curious eyes. 'It would relieve me of just a quarter of my responsibilities if you would read the part.'

'I think I know it,' said Jill. 'Unless I have forgotten.'

'Studied it?' said Johnny, with another sweeping glance. He had recognised Ursula's 'voice-trainer' now, for Miss Darcy had referred to her also.

'No, but I acted in this piece once, and—' she made a little gesture.

'Picked it up.' The part she must have taken was clear to his consciousness as he spoke, for it is only Rosalind, in the 'piece,' who is invariably present when Celia speaks. But he hardly thought it out then, being simply relieved to see his company complete. Putting a hand on the stage, he vaulted suddenly upon it, and began to kick the furniture into position, in the same competent and casual manner as that in which he had disposed his cast.

'We might start at the beginning then,' he remarked to the audience in general,—just as if it would have struck a stage-manager to begin anywhere else. 'We can have the girl's scene, Miss Falkland, after all,—and I shall have the pleasure, Edward, of knocking you down. I thought I should be engaged as a lady just then, but now I'm quite at your service, only just look out for the candles.'

'Start with the first scene, Ingestre,' called Mr. Mitchell,—as though this, again, were quite a fresh idea: a kind of original inspiration, on the part of a commentator of genius.

'Do, Johnny,' said Mitchell's wife in the same tone. 'It's all such pretty talking.'

'Won't you?' Helena asked shyly, looking up at him as he stood on the stage.

'Not me,' he answered with decision. 'Can't be bothered to tell you fairy-stories, Fanny. You can get up and tell those ladies the first chapter, if you like: sort of way the feuilletons do.'

Fanny laughed. 'Do it yourself,' she returned, 'since you're up. We'd all like to hear you. I'm sure I've forgotten the way the plot goes,—so's Mitchell, probably.'

John was silent for a space, looking round him. The sight of so many mixed guests seemed to move him pleasantly. He was bound, his expression said, to have some of them on, if he tried. His father, for instance,—

'Well, you can just represent to yourselves,' he began of a sudden in a new tone, low and clear, which produced silence immediately, 'that this, having been an orchard where my brother brought me up, and where I grew a little bigger than he expected—as you see—and where I cheeked him at intervals, with the best of provocation—as I haven't time to show you—has now got to be turned into a Duke's garden.'

'Bless him, it does me good to hear his pretty voice again,' murmured Fanny, settling back in her chair with the air of a tired queen.

'Reason why,' pursued Johnny, 'I've challenged the Duke's wrestler, who always does it among the flower-beds—*that's* a flower-bed—and whose habit it is to kill the men he throws. Nowadays that would be bad form, but in the Ducal period it was different.'

'Too absurd, isn't he?' said Ursula to her father-in-law, keeping a careful watch upon the door.

'I'd *much* sooner have had swords,' said Johnny with sudden excitement, 'only owing to my brother's beastly education—er—obscuring and hiding from me all gentlemanlike qualities—I never learnt to hold one.'

Such of his friends as knew his fighting qualities appreciated this, and he gave them time. He thrust his hands in his jacket pockets, and turned slightly in his father's direction.

'I come of a decent family, and bear an honourable name——'

'Hear, hear,' said a shabby actor gravely: Mr. Ingestre the elder stirred in his seat.

'My gentility has been mined, however——'

'Has been what?' said Mr. Ingestre.

'Mined, father: undermined, you know. My gentility has been undermined—er—in youth, by associating with my inferiors.' Johnny's expressive eye fell on Fanny, who was smiling. 'The result is, I can only wrestle, and write verses, and—er—kill lions, and so on: things like that. I'm a credit, in short, to my shocking education, and quite a nice young feller—oh, yes, I am, Fanny, you wait and see. Now, when you're all ready—' Johnny reviewed his company slowly, one by one—'I shouldn't wonder if we started. It's getting time.'

'He speaks well,' said Jill to Helena. 'Who is he?'

'The master of this house,' said Helena gently, 'and a quite wonderful actor.'

'I can see he acts,' said Jill. 'He has good hands.'

Helena looked at her: it was odd of the queer-looking girl to pick that out. Helena thought Johnny's brown hands beautiful too; she had been watching them while he fingered the furniture carelessly in throwing it about. She thrilled when, in the course of rehearsal, he laid one of them upon her, in pushing her to her place. Her eyes followed him, clung to him, through all his careless changes. He *was* that young hero he described to her, 'of all sorts enchantingly beloved.' She felt the truth of it, looking round her at her strange society. 'Enchantingly,'—oh, insidious phrase for a girl's secret imagination to toy with! Shakespeare, who knew girls, would never have used it in the connection had he known.

Obviously, Helena was in danger. She could barely escape. He had all the attractions possible to a girl of her age, including the unknown, the inexplicable. His two personalities, his two manners towards her, puzzled and absorbed her. *Tête-à-tête* in rehearsal he had dragooned her lately, managed her, rated her even, shown himself both sharp and kind. *Tête-à-tête* in society he played with her as a pretty child. The two manners did not mix,

he kept them separate, and she barely knew by his appearance which was likely to be uppermost at any moment. In the one mood she was alert to please him, in the other she feared to please too much. Suspecting his home circumstances shyly, though both Ursula and Violet had concealed them well, she pitied him in secret. Every time he flashed into art, she admired him more keenly. The state of things was, to say the least, alarming, and Mrs. Falkland had every reason to be solicitous, had she known.

Helena would have given all she had, far more than he dreamed, to please him on the present occasion. She had been innocently hoping, if only by her sweet appearance, and careful following of his instruction, to win a word of praise. But fate was not kind. It was not only her genuine shy feeling hampered her,—she was almost instantly obscured by contrast too. Little had she guessed what that queer little Miss Jacoby, whom Mr. Auberon had introduced, was purposing for her discomfiture; how, while she sat demure at Miss Falkland's side, she was even panting for the chance! No one could have guessed it, with Jill's wary demeanour, till the moment came. Throughout the opening scene, from the moment when Helena, followed by Jill summarily dressed and limping slightly, swam upon the stage, the whole attention of the uncritical was fixed on radiant Rosalind, but Celia had the expert's ear.

'Lord, what's this?' said John's movement and Mitchell's, simultaneously. Mitchell's wife, from first to last, never moved her eyes from the girl, though her face did not change its dreamy weary expression. She was like a woman, tired out, who caught, in so listening and watching, some faint memory.

'No,' cried the little Celia, 'when Nature hath made a fair creature, may she not by fortune fall into the fire?'

She could barely be said to have a foreign accent, yet her accent was noticeable, and she trilled the letter 'r' just perceptibly, as the Parisian actress does. 'A fair cr-reature,' she said. It came again, several times over,

when she accosted Johnny, a speech losing nothing in stately elegance of diction by those repeated little trills.

'Young gentleman,' said Jill, looking up at him—far up—with perfect dignity, 'your spirits are too bold for your years. You have seen cruel proof of this man's strength. . . . We pray you to embrace your safety, and give over this attempt.'

Johnny almost smiled at the time, and almost laughed later, more than once, in pure joy at the revelation of a personality, not Jill's but Celia's. He had really forgotten it was such a charming part. Yet, as the action proceeded, his eyes, curious and dissecting, pierced Celia's interpreter several times. Something was wrong. She was doing it, in a way, too well, too fiercely well. Also she was competing, it was no longer a second part as she rendered it. That suggested not only unbalanced judgment, but he feared, some measure of ill-will. She meant to override Miss Falkland, she had that in view. It might be merely youth, but he thought it was other things, passions moving, a character out of hand. It just reached, and just disturbed him. He glanced at Fanny once, saw her melancholy and intent, and wondered if she thought as he did. She knew something of this kind of girl. Fanny, in the course of her own tempestuous and exhausting life, had saved many such a girl from wreckage, that he knew.

Meantime, and even in the act of so pondering, divining and judging, Mr. John Ingestre junior enjoyed himself immensely. It was long since he had acted, really acted, and with this new girl alongside he had naturally to 'buck up.' The process he would so have described was a little paralysing to the world at large. He knew perfectly well that the part of Orlando suited him, that he was impressing his father, amusing the Mitchells, and slightly scandalising his wife and her nice friends. Being so well above the level of his company, he had some temptation to overdo it farcically, but, perhaps with Jill's warning before him, he did not. He was only, as he had promised them, a 'nice young feller,' one of the nicest Shakespeare, that

lover of boys, ever presented to a happy world. It put the whole of his mixed audience into a good temper merely to look at him. The grotesque Miss Darcy and the beautiful Fanny agreed about him with an indulgent smile. Even his own wife unbent, though Ursula still regretted that he was not dressed. It must seem so odd, thought Ursula, for those Mitchell people, and the *real* actors, to see John in tweed upon a stage. Far from 'embracing his safety,' as Miss Jacoby urged him, Johnny sent Edward flying, in the wrestling-bout, with such ultra-youthful vivacity, that Edward rolled right off the small stage, and had to be retrieved by another actor in the stalls. Immediately after which, Johnny turned shy, and made the first parting with his lady, by his right use of gesture and pause, no droop of eyelash scamped, the thing of beauty it should be, a love-scene from a younger world.

'Deuced pretty, that is,' remarked Mr. Ingestre as the scene closed, scratching his jaw meditatively, as he glanced in Ursula's direction. He was speculating whether Johnny was in reality off his head about that red-haired lass on the stage: because, with Johnny's wife sitting in the post of honour at his side, it was really rather awkward not to be sure.

Lastly, in the short dialogue with himself, as Jaques, Johnny scored such a triumph of neat elocution and natural humour combined, that the room, regardless of warnings to the contrary, broke into applause. At the point where he observed abruptly to his other self—'I am weary of you,'—the actor-manager threw back his head and laughed, all alone; and Mrs. Mitchell informed her host point-blank at the close of the scene that he was far too good for the classic drama, and had better try his fortune at the 'halls.'

So much for Johnny. There followed on this, barely separated, Helena's big scenes, which bored the professionals mightily, as anyone could have seen by their expressions. The fact that the rest of the room (who had rather forgotten Shakespeare) were charmed, helped Miss Falkland's cause but little. Johnny did what he could to

spur and prompt her: but with the dull faces beneath her, she was growing nervous by rapid degrees, and did not even do herself and his careful training justice. She was frightened, and so heavy, and it struck John once or twice that she was not really textually expert, barely knew the fuller sense or finer wit of what she was saying. She was ignorant, an ignorant child; she was failing, and she knew it; more, and more wonderful, she was afraid of him.

'I can't,' she said once, beneath her breath: and he caught her glance upon him, liquid and frightened, as though she feared his blame.

His blame! Schoolmaster, was he? Johnny could have laughed. He could never have said at what point of that awakening afternoon his heart melted to her,—while he yet criticised it happened,—just there, perhaps, when he divined in her frightened glance the breaking up of her ambitions, her dependence on his approval, her childish fear of having forfeited that, with all the rest. Exactly in proportion as her failure became clear, his feeling to her grew clearer also. No success could possibly have so endeared her to him, being what he was. Already on the stage, before the play finished, he was shielding, supporting her tacitly, with all the art he possessed; and they had not left the stage for five minutes, before he was aware that even more accomplished help was needed.

The Mitchells,—the man at least,—were rude to Rosalind as only your artist can be rude. He gave her the formula that means nothing, or less than nothing, on her acting, while his eyes took stock of her physical claims, too visibly. Mrs. Mitchell was kinder, so far as a perfectly implacable judge can seem kind. The pair talked nothings across her for five minutes: and having thus done their social duty, as they considered, and satisfied Johnny, they both turned from her to the 'second girl.'

'Take those third-act scenes again, will you, Ingestre?' said the manager, with barely-veiled authority, after five

minutes' rapid talk with Jill. 'She studied them three years since, but she's bound to remember if she remembers the rest so well. From the scroll-business onward. Cut anything, gag if you choose: give her the Rosalind cues, that's all, and play up to her showily, if you know what I mean. I want to see.'

Johnny did know, knowing Mitchell, and also knew there was no escape. Under the circumstances, and his own roof, he could hardly refuse. But even as he agreed, his eye fled round the room, searching for Helena.

He saw her near the door, taking leave of the last group of Ursula's contingent, who were departing with their hostess to the tea-room. He had already heard her gently refuse Ursula's offer of tea,—she must remain to face her critics, naturally,—and to see her own part played by another, to her face! Johnny swore beneath his breath. He would have driven her out, then and there, if he could, but it was useless. He looked about the rapidly-emptying room, begged Jill,—or rather Jill's tyrant,—for two minutes' grace, and went up to his father, who was on the verge of leaving too.

'I say,' jerked Johnny in his rear. 'Can you stop half an hour?'

Mr. Ingestre turned in surprise. 'At need,' he said. 'Why?'

Johnny explained, looking rather sulky, with his eyes lowered. 'I've got to follow orders, for the moment,' he said. 'Every man in their turn, and that brute's a martinet at home. I want you to catch Miss Falkland, when she comes back from the door, keep her by you, make love to her, flatter her all you're fit,—d'you mind?'

'I can manage,' said Mr. Ingestre, with a sardonic eye. 'I thought that was your job, though.'

'I can't,' said Johnny resentfully. 'Mitchell's just asked me to insult her deliberately.' He went into detail, and his father's attitude grew more sympathetic.

'Rough on the little girl,' he agreed, 'when she tried

so hard, and looked so pretty about it. Very good: I'll turn Miss Rosalind's attention upon herself, if words can do it. Is that all?'

'Shall you be seeing Violet?' said Johnny.

'Immediately. I'm due there at this minute. What am I to say?'

'Nothing,' said Johnny, after a pause. 'I'll see to it.'

'Is it as bad as that?' said Mr. Ingestre.

'It's pretty vile, for the poor girl. I pretty well knew it would be, if it wasn't a clear success. I intended a success,' explained Johnny. 'Mitchell's got the manners of a swine,—a gilded swine, which is worse. That's my fault, of course, I let her in for that. One had to risk it, in getting a good man.' He paused, his eye flitting to Helena by the door. He still looked sulky and spoke curtly, which generally meant he was anxious. 'Fact is, I've rotted it pretty well, so far, but you needn't tell Violet that. I'll see Fanny afterwards, and pull things straight if I can,—but Fan can't do much with Mitchell across her, really. Luckily he's gone off for the moment on the other girl. Hope he stays there, that's all. I'm not wanting him to turn his commercial eye on Miss Falkland now. He can drop it.'

'Humph!' said Mr. Ingestre. He gave his son another sly glance, while his eyes were diverted. Johnny, when he was disturbed, was given to betraying himself, for all his marked ability, in general, to delude. 'Well, go along with you. I'll see to the girl, if that's all. I can stop for that.'

'I don't want Montagu and her to get together, barring I'm there,' insisted Johnny. 'See?'

'Not likely any Montagu'd get the chance,' said Mr. Ingestre, 'or Capulet either, before I leave myself.' He pushed his son about his business, and turned with new interest to meet the Falkland girl, who was approaching.

As a rule Johnny's father took his proceedings in the social world for granted, not to mention, by this time, his success. It amused Mr. Ingestre, as it had occasionally

amused his wife, to see him manœuvre his way through his crowd of women, playing the fool, shaking them off restively at times, but always returning inevitably to their ways again. The fact that Johnny had got himself tangled in a nice little net composed of Violet and Fanny and the Falkland girl, complicated by Ursula, would not in itself have surprised his father at all. That was merely Johnny's way, and, generally speaking, he enjoyed it, and invariably, hitherto, he had escaped scot-free. It was really, on the broad lines of justice, high time that Fate took her revenge upon him, only Mr. Ingestre had grown somehow into the belief that Fate never would.

It was chance, of course, in part, his happy chance, that had protected him: largely the kind of woman he had come across, who had, in the majority of cases, preferred to pamper him for his charms, like a child. But beyond that, Johnny himself was difficult, his was not really an easy taste to please. His eye was caught easily, he enjoyed experiment, and practised trifling as a pleasant game: but as soon as he was in the noose, he twisted and looked aside. He was an elusive person under compulsion, as Mr. Ingestre had discovered long since, to his cost: and the compulsion of his own nature would be enough to alarm him. He would never agree to serve, in short, except in the highest temple, the temple of his deliberate choice. Was it conceivable this little girl of nineteen was framed to occupy that pedestal? That was Mr. Ingestre's present problem, his newest interest, evoked by Johnny's unusual behaviour. It seemed, to the man of the world, an absurd idea; but then his son, on the side he knew least, had often seemed absurd, rash, at least, and unaccountable.

He admitted the danger anew, as he talked to Helena, and all the more that he had been talking to Ursula just previously. He could not pretend to suppose, at this time of day, that the marriage he had prompted had been a success, though how far it was a tragedy he had not penetrated at present. He could not, for all his natural

guile, get at the facts. His son and Ursula both dodged him, Ursula even more persistently than John. Mr. Ingestre had been 'drawing' Ursula that afternoon, with all the arts that were known to him, in vain. He could drag no definite complaint out of her, though her general attitude was that of resentment, hostility to all enquiry or interference with her concerns. That it was John's family's concern as well she did not seem to realise, or deliberately ignored the issue. She talked coolly and correctly on superficial subjects, smilingly granted John's 'flirtations' with this woman and that, and shut her lips upon her grievances, with that air of natural superiority and mild martyrdom to which the family were used. The family were getting a little tired of the attitude, though of course, on principle, they supported Ursula and swore at—that is, censured—John. Mr. Ingestre, in his heart, was inclined to think Ursula a dreadful woman, both cold and sly; but nothing would have induced him to air the opinion, since he had 'backed' the girl originally. He would hardly word it to himself.

For the moment, the programme presented him was agreeable, with a nice girl to flatter and amuse, the excellent excuse of doing so in his son's interest, and the prospect, on the proximate horizon, of wreaking his inner uneasiness and dissatisfaction upon Mrs. Shovell's head, since his own wife, who should have borne it, was out of town. Violet was useful for this purpose, as several of the Ingestres had discovered. She was both clever and accommodating, and none of her distinguished connections were that. They were one thing, or the other. Johnny and his father and his grandmother were clever, and his aunts were accommodating, that was the way they divided it: each excellent quality excluding the other completely, in every case.

Johnny's programme was less attractive, by far. As he climbed the stage once more, he was in a state to loathe Miss Jacoby for driving him to the necessity. She might have had the decency to refuse, he thought. Once upon the

boards, and launched in dialogue with her, his instincts were too much for him, naturally, and he acted her lover as he had never acted Helena's. He cut nothing, for all the manager's kind permission: and the reading of the scrolls, the challenge to the game of love, all the charming war of words ran through without a hitch. The girl was brilliant, inspiring, certainly: yet still, something was wrong. She did not move quite as John expected, and he had more than once to tone his own action to correspond; while behind the light echo of her delicious voice, he was feeling for the tragedy that underlay the comedy, all the time. She smiled without her eyes, he noted, being close; her eyes were tired. Rosalind was emphatically not the part for her, neatly though she played it. Perhaps Juliet, perhaps Ophelia,—never Rosalind.

'Pretty good, eh?' said Mitchell, taking his wife's opinion. He was the slave of her opinion secretly, but she did not seem to want to give it, or all of it, on this occasion. She would tell Ingestre later, probably. Mitchell would get it round through him.

'Why doesn't she move better on her feet, though? That's all I want to know. All above her hips is easy, it's only below. Look at that!' They watched again.

Indeed, it was clear enough, to critics placed beneath her, as soon as she stood in Rosalind's shoes, the infirmity she had hidden so cleverly as Celia. The part calls for buoyant and brusque movement: and just where she should have been easiest, ankles and knees, this Rosalind was tied. No acting, ingenious as the acting was, could cover it. The little ring of critics were watching a *tour de force*.

'She's saving steps, certainly,' said the actress. 'Though she could act if she was planted. She's built to act. Twisted her ankle possibly, getting up.'

'What's the name, did Johnny say?' asked Mitchell.

'Jill Jacoby,' said Fanny, still absent.

The manager laughed. 'Well, at the worst she could sell it,' he said.

Quentin Auberon, sitting two places beyond them, and stiffening visibly as he listened, at the laugh turned about.

'Would you mind not talking quite so loud?' he said cuttingly to Mitchell. 'Miss Jacoby is lame.'

'Lame?' said the manager sharply. 'She's on her feet.'

'She'll suffer for it,' said Quentin. 'She's suffering now. She can't walk across a room without limping. She's been lame for years.'

'Oh, curse it all!' muttered the manager, collapsing: and there was silence all round, for some time.

Then the manager's wife arose quietly, with no excuse to Mitchell who might want her, moved along, and sat down by Mr. Auberon. It seemed she wanted to know a few more details: and Quentin, having looked her fairly in the face, decided to let her know them.

'Isn't she a darling?' said Helena suddenly. 'I do feel so sorry for her, I don't know why.'

Mr. Ingestre looked round at her astonished. The instant after, her fair head was in her hands.

'I can't bear it,' she gasped. 'It's Shakespeare—and everything. Oh, do you think I can get away?'

'Go, my dear,' he responded. 'No one's attending to us.'

'Nor ever will,' said Helena. She laughed and looked up with wet eyes. 'Mr. Ingestre, is that genius?' she asked. 'I have so often wondered what it was,—if it existed really. It must be, I think, to make one feel such a fool.'

'It is,' said Johnny's father. 'And this, I think, is generosity. It's fully as uncommon, Miss Falkland,—rather more so. Will you take an old man's word for it?' He put a hand on her wrist for a moment. Helena's head had sunk again, and he saw she was struggling with her tears.

'Would you mind telling—your son?' she said, with a last effort. 'Say it's the heat—a headache. You are all—much too kind.'

And she slipped away.

PART III



THE GOLDEN FLEECE

I

JOHNNY wrote to Helena, and Helena debated long whether to tell her mother about it. It was a business note,—but then it was in his hand, and bore his full signature at the end. Helena was not sure whether such a document could concern her mother really, and she carried it away to her room, and sat over it, guarding it, as it were, for long.

It was quite a few lines, expressed curtly, but courteously, —even to formality. First, he excused himself for writing by mentioning that he had not been able to get a private word with her on Sunday afternoon. Then he asked 'if he might hope' she would let him know, at once, any proposal Mitchell might make her of the professional order. It might be better, he said, since he had experience, that he should act as intermediary, and judge of the nature of the offer, or at least undertake the interviews. *Unless*, Johnny concluded, her brother or her father preferred to do so.

After that he was 'hers to command'—playful, of course, —John Ingestre.

It was that 'unless' which occupied Helena. There was a serious suggestion in it which, having borne Mitchell's manner and glances the day before, she understood. She could not but understand it. Helena was not so raw in experience as not to know that beauty alone has its market value on the stage, as in the seething crowd below: but she had not thought to have to dwell upon it, naturally. She had been more than a little vain, in secret, of her acting talent,—she had cried most of that Sunday night

with disappointment and hurt pride,—so that it had never occurred to her simple soul that, in bidding for a place in the public eye, she might have to depend upon her face alone. It had been a really horrible awakening,—a real shock ; but Mitchell's brutality had left her little doubt of the truth, before this note of Johnny's came, kindly and delicately, to finish the work.

She was sure, quite sure, that was what it meant : death to her hopes of fame,—defeat. The other girl had obscured her, of course,—she had suffered one wild rush of resentment against Jill,—but it was not only that. She had faith enough in the expert to believe that that would not have diverted the Mitchells' attention so entirely, if she herself had boasted one spark of Jill's genius for the career. Had that other girl been radiantly beautiful to boot, perhaps,—but she was little and lame and dependent,—Helena had the whole panoply of worldly advantages on her side : and still—still they had looked away.

Johnny himself had looked away : he had, she knew it. He had not only made charming love, duty-bound, to Jill upon the stage. He had been impressed and overborne by her attainments, quite grave in his respect. Helena had been at his elbow when he congratulated her the first time, trusted earnestly she was not too tired, and thanked her for her help. He had been more than the polite host, more than the grateful manager, at that moment. Helena had seen it, and had heard.

If anything—anything she could do, in life, with years of patient study and self-repression, would turn that look of his upon herself ! That was himself,—she knew him now,—had been privileged to divine the central man, the essential part. She felt she held it, nursed it with his letter in her hands. His wife missed it utterly, his father ignored, his friends travestied and made light of it, Mrs. Shovell had been given a glimpse perhaps,—but she had never seen as much as Helena ! She had not been taught by him, talked to by him during long delightful working mornings,

scolded by him, and watched by critical cool eyes that never changed, or relaxed the high standard he guarded, in secret, for himself. Helena was the first in the world to share that, so she believed. He was an artist, a power that could make the Mitchells stare and laugh, while they feigned to look aside. He was her master, Helena's,—because she wanted him so much to be ! She longed to be mastered, passionately, granted it should be by him. It was not fair, it was not reasonable, that anyone should think her wicked for desiring that.

So, having reached this discovery, that it was not the applause of the world she wanted any longer, but only and simply his,—she awoke with a start. A start almost of horror, for indeed she had thought that her ambition was real. It must be there still, that cherished dream of years, if she looked for it. It was not possible she was so shallow, such a humbug as that !

Helena arose, shook herself, walked about, and looked for her ambition where she had been accustomed to find it, in all the corners of her room. It was in none of the familiar places,—quite other, surging thoughts were there. She put the note on her dressing-table and looked at it. Then she looked at herself in the glass. What was happening to her ? What was to become of her ? What—would he say ?

Out,—that was Helena's next thought, her next conscious thought, for it occurred after a long time,—out of doors. When she was crossest in the country, a long walk was her remedy, and this was worse than being cross, by far. . . . Unluckily, she was a young lady enjoying her first season in London : there were no country vistas anywhere to look at : nothing lay beneath her window but odious, dusty streets. Also, it was just lunch-time,—it always is at these crises of our fate,—bells and things would be ringing immediately,—her father, Harold and Mr. Auberon would appear from different quarters of the house, and look at her, with their pleasant familiar faces, across a table.

This last thought could simply not be borne. Some excuse must be thought of to avoid it. Ill?—she was never ill, that would barely be credited. Helena put on her hat, determined at least to get a breath of air, and ran downstairs with extreme, rather unusual impetuosity. Her movements were stately and quiet as a rule.

There was a shriek and yelp and scramble as she reached the bottom of the stairs.

‘Oh, darling!’ ejaculated Miss Falkland in passionate apology.

The darling in question, as usual in that house, was a dog. It was the latest fat puppy, belonging primarily to all the Falklands, who fought for it; and in a secondary manner to Lesbia, the Captain’s faithful hound. Observing Miss Falkland on the staircase, it had naturally rolled over on the mat to bite her shoe as she came by: only she came too fast, and overwhelmed it.

Helena, having only just saved herself by great address and agility from a serious fall, picked up Lesbia’s puppy to comfort and caress. The sight of it suggested an idea of escape, so simply brilliant, that she cheered at once. She would invite herself out to lunch at a quiet house, and play with a baby afterwards. A baby was the next best thing to the open country, after all.

Helena had pursued her acquaintance with Mrs. Shovell under difficulties, since her mother persistently disapproved of her, until she had had the cunning idea one day of introducing her father, casually, during a walk in the Park. The ruse succeeded, quite beyond her hopes. Mrs. Shovell, it appeared, was looking for a dog, and the Captain rose to the bait immediately. He talked for twenty minutes about dogs in general, and for another twenty minutes about his dog. Before the close of his conversation (if it could be called so) with Helena’s friend, he had paid her the highest compliment man, in the person of the Captain, could offer to woman,—a puppy of Lesbia’s. Mrs. Shovell accepted in a proper spirit, and the puppy was now under-

going daily instruction in the domestic arts, with a view to taking charge of her household.

Helena put the protesting puppy in a basket, and told the servants in the dining-room that she was invited out to lunch, and would they tell Captain Falkland she was taking the little dog, because the lady wanted to look at it.

This was true, in so far as that no lady in existence could refuse to look at Lesbia's puppy, once her attention was called to it ; but the rest of the excuse was entirely false, because Helena had no invitation. It only occurred to her, in the happy manner in which things did occur, that Mrs. Shovell was always alone for the midday meal, since her husband lunched in town : and that her company was less intolerable by several degrees than that of anyone Helena could think of in the ranks of her acquaintance, new and old. Why this was, Helena had not the least idea, since she never analysed people, she only let her enthusiasms lead her blindly. She thought Violet rather old, and bewilderingly brilliant,—Johnny had quoted her once or twice—but as she had quite determined, before this took place, to love her ardently, it hardly mattered ; and she continued to seek her society, and that of her composed baby, whenever life's problems became quite too much for her, as to-day.

' Hal-lo ! ' said John, stopping short, much perturbed.

Gentlemen do not customarily call on their friends at the end of the midday luncheon hour, so we may acquit Helena of all design in the matter, and Helena's hostess of all intrigue. Not to mention that Mr. Ingestre seemed as much put out as either of them.

' May I introduce you ? ' said Violet, supposing him to be struck with the beauty of Lesbia's puppy, which occupied the third place at the table, facing her. Johnny, with an effort, turned his attention in that direction.

' What sort of a dog is it ? ' he said, having taken it in with the cold eye of a connoisseur.

'It's not exactly——' began Helena.

'It's a watch-puppy,' said Violet firmly. 'The son of a great watch-dog. Helena's father is teaching it. It's supposed to be at school.'

'What's it learning?' said Johnny.

'Protection, John: of me and my belongings. You must be very careful what you say.'

'Pooh,' said Johnny, after a pause. 'It's not a real dog,—it's a kind of rabbit.'

Advancing to the table, he reached across and picked up three silver spoons from it, choosing with care. Then he slid them into his pocket, clashed them ostentatiously, and looked at the puppy. Lesbia's puppy looked back with one ear up and its head inclined slightly to the side, as though taking note of curious social customs in a strange land. But there was sentiment in the gaze as well,—ardour, submission, confidence,—everything that a burglar least expects.

'Isn't it *sweet*?' said Miss Falkland, in a tone of awe.

'Call that a dog?' said Johnny. He laughed. 'Violet, I say,—he dropped his hands on her shoulders from behind,—'I'm going home again.'

'Not with my spoons,' Violet murmured. She tried to see his face, feeling his tone and behaviour unusual; but as he persisted in standing just behind her, was not able.

'I only came to leave some things,' Johnny pursued, 'roses and so on, Mother sent up from the country. They're tired with the journey,—pretty dead,—I left them out there in the hall.'

'Not roses, John!'

'Yes, because I looked inside. They're the dropping white ones, out of her little greenhouse,—remember? One fell all to pieces when I took it out.'

'Dreadful,' said Violet, as grave as he. 'But aren't they meant for Ursula?'

'No,' he asseverated, 'they're mine, all mine; she sent

'em to me. It means she's too tired to write, probably,' he added, 'I wish I knew.'

Violet, as usual where the matter touched Ursula, did not argue the point of possession. Ursula did not care for his mother,—she did,—that was enough for Johnny. His instincts in such things had all the weight of another person's good reasons.

'Am I to go to them now?' she enquired with lifted brows.

Johnny pinched her neck for all answer. He did not know what he wanted. He thought she could find out.

Violet supposed he might wish to lecture Helena on the acting, or something of that sort. A pinch is not of much assistance to a hostess, especially when she is not allowed to see a man's face. She rose.

'You can have my chair,' she told him. 'Will you take care of Miss Falkland, and bring her up to the drawing-room when she has finished? She's pretty dead, too, after yesterday,—I think you overworked her. You look the better for it, as usual.' She laughed at him.

'On the contrary,' said Johnny earnestly, 'I had a rotten time. I say, you needn't go.' He now seemed dissatisfied with her movement, and detained her with a finger and thumb.

However, on second thoughts, he loosed her and subsided in her chair; and she went, swiftly in her fashion, snapping her fingers to the puppy by the way. Whereupon the puppy, diverted from its fixed worship of the great creature, man, by the airy movement, tumbled off its chair in a hurry, and followed her whisking skirts.

Silence ensued on their departure. Johnny looked shy, just like Orlando on the stage. He wondered if Miss Falkland were offended with him, and what must have been her opinion of that presumptuous letter. He had been certain, the instant after despatching it, that the letter was a thoroughly awkward stroke, ill-written, and cheeky in the extreme. He was sure now, by Miss Falk-

land's majestic and benign appearance, that she was resenting it greatly, though she might be too kind to say so.

Helena wondered a little at his silence,—she had never known him silent before. Yet he could say nothing in the circumstances, but that she had failed, which was not his fault,—the contrary. She decided that, fearful as it was, she would have to open the conversation.

‘I wanted—to thank you——’ she hesitated.

‘You needn’t,’ he cut swiftly in. ‘I’ve done nothing for you, but let you in for a pretty rank time of it, all round.’ A pause, his eyes wandering. ‘And it was fair cheek to write,’ he pressed on, ‘but I couldn’t well avoid it, in the state of things. You see, I know them. You can trust Fan—Mrs. Mitchell to the hilt, she’s good stuff through and through. But I wouldn’t trust Mr. Monty more than you can see him with the naked eye,—that’s all. And in any case you have to keep your eyes open in the trade,’ he concluded hastily.

‘I know that,’ she said gently. ‘At least I mean, I recognise it now. The only thing I wonder now, is why you ever troubled about me at all.’

‘Do you?’ said Johnny.

She laughed, and then covered her face. She had not meant to,—but really, things were a little too much.

‘Don’t cry,’ said Johnny, suddenly reckless. ‘If you cry, I shall go. I shall have to. As it is, I oughtn’t to be here.’

He got up, really alarmed of his own feelings, seized a handful of nuts from a dish in front of him, and went to the window with them, while she recovered. Cracking nuts with his strong fingers was some slight solace for the itch he felt in them to get at the elegant Mitchell’s throat. He had all but quarrelled with Mitchell the day before,—and then again, he had avoided it. For the beast was very sharp, and had best not be given to understand that Johnny was—as it were—over-interested in Miss Falkland.

So, on second thoughts, Johnny had let it alone, and talked a bit to Fanny, who was steadily, and for years past, his friend.

'I'd better not have meddled,' he said in a troubled tone. 'You'd have found something, probably, sooner or later, on your own lines.'

'I'd have found the imitation,' said Helena, 'and you showed me the real. A little bit of it, but enough. I shall never forget your acting, nor hers. Don't think I'm ungrateful, please. It's only——' She paused, biting her lip. 'Oh,' she cried, swerving to him,—'*wasn't* I a donkey ever to think of it?—just tell me the truth.'

'You care for it,' said Johnny, half-turning too, 'and you're serious. Half the girls who go in for it are not, specially if they look like you. Excuse me, Miss Falkland, it's the fact. It's more than probable Mitchell thought you asked no better than to be looked at.' He paused in turn. 'But she saw further, I ought to tell you that. She told me she liked your earnestness, and that you had a style.'

'She? Mrs. Mitchell? Did she really?' The girl's face glowed through her tears. 'How frightfully good you all are to me!' she said, her beautiful warmth breaking like the sun through mists. 'And you say you have done nothing for me, Mr. Ingestre, when you have got me that!'

Johnny laughed, liking it though. 'Fan's an impulsive soul,' he said, subsiding with his collection of nuts on the sill of the open garden window, 'but she meant it. And I'll go as far as to say one of her words is worth ten of his,—or mine.'

'Could you find ten for me?' ventured Helena. 'I don't mind what sort. You can't be angrier about it than I am, anyhow. Would you tell me exactly what you think,—truth between us? Would you mind?'

'I would,' said Johnny privately. He cracked a nut, considering. 'What do you want to know?' he temporised.

'Hadn't I better let it drop altogether? Aren't I wasting my time?'

'I don't suppose you waste time practising any art,' said Johnny with caution. 'Specially Shakespeare,—pretty good stuff,—er—rather a special line to speak him.' He glanced at her, but she did not seem satisfied. He looked all round the room, and about the garden, for inspiration. 'It's an—er—question of comparison, I should say.' Inspiration arrived. 'You ask Violet what she thinks.'

'I'm asking you,' said Miss Falkland.

Johnny's eyebrows went up, and down again. She put him in a hard position. In the interval Hamlet's observation—'Get thee to a nunnery,' came unbidden to his mind, and he wanted to laugh. He constantly wanted to laugh to-day, for no particular reason. He looked furtively in Miss Falkland's direction, with the unborn laughter in his eyes,—and behold, she smiled as well. So it was hopeless, and they smiled at one another.

'Mr. Ingestre,—are you one of the people who think women ought not to work at all?' said Helena gravely.

'Some of 'em have to,' said Johnny. 'I think often they're—er—better occupied when they don't.'

Helena considered this paradox. 'Like your cousin,' she suggested. 'But she could have done heaps of things.'

'Violet could have been a third-rate pianiste,' said Johnny, turning the matter over. 'Second-rate, if she put her back into it. Bad second-rate, let's say.' A pause. 'She's better occupied bucking up the dead flowers, and seeing to Shovell's food,——'

'And dancing with you,' said Helena.

'She was pretty thoroughly occupied then,' agreed Johnny. 'Do you like nuts, Miss Falkland?' He held her out some, ready picked, in his palm.

Helena felt she ought to have refused politely; but his manner was deceptively easy, and she happened to share the taste. Besides, let a London season do its worst, the

schoolgirl is still in existence at nineteen, hardly veiled by the polite lady. So for a time they ate nuts in concert, like a pair of street boys. Both were silent, but neither was at all uncomfortable. Helena liked to see him sitting at the window, and Johnny was enjoying the sun. That is, he supposed it was the sun he was enjoying—it was a very decent kind of day.

‘And what about Mrs. Mitchell?’ said Helena, resuming suddenly. ‘She has done something, hasn’t she?’

‘She has,’ said Johnny with emphasis. ‘And worn herself to rags by forty-five.’

‘Are you sure it’s her work has worn her?’ said Helena, greatly venturing. ‘It might be other things.’

‘Mitchell, for instance,’ said Johnny.

‘Marriage,’ said Helena. ‘Even I have seen some people worn out by that.’

Suddenly, quite unforeseen, for she had spoken in all innocence, Ursula came to her mind, and she blushed furiously. In the same instant, rather hurriedly, she rose. ‘I expect Mrs. Shovell’s waiting for us upstairs,’ she said, in a tone consciously sedate: delicious to Johnny, who had coaxed her into her late audacity with care. ‘I don’t know what I’m thinking about, keeping you down here, when of course you want to talk to her.’

‘Why should I want to talk to her?’ said Johnny, his eyes detaining her.

‘Well, I suppose that’s what you came for, wasn’t it? I’m sure it wasn’t only the flowers.’

He had nothing to answer for the moment. ‘I may have wanted to curse to her a little,’ he confessed with a laugh, stretching his arms. ‘That’s what my father comes here for, often, when my mother’s too ill to attend to him. It’s one of the uses of women,—one of the nice occupations for ’em I mentioned.’

‘I happen to know better,’ said Helena.

‘What do you know?’ he said quickly, looking round.

‘You are not a person to complain, ever, Mrs. Shovell

says : you are much too proud. I don't know about your father, but I'm sure about you.'

'I don't say complain,' said Johnny. 'You don't complain of things for which you're chiefly responsible : at least, I don't. But we make women suffer for 'em, all the same. I'm a brute, you know, Miss Falkland. Perhaps you've guessed it.'

She only shook her head. She was standing now, clear of the lunch-table, eyes levelled past him, liquid and thoughtful, her fingers clasped,—waiting his good pleasure to rise, of course. It was sickening manners not to,—simply sickening,—but Johnny still sat in the sun.

'What's Violet told you about me?' he said suddenly.

'Nothing,' said Helena, blushing. 'Except that your father was rather—rough with you, and your mother kind.'

'If my father's rough with me, I'm rough with him,' said Johnny. 'We pull things pretty equal between us. My mother's an angel upon earth.' He waited a minute. 'So's my wife, another variety. So's the kid up there, when she holds her tongue, which isn't often.' He tossed the last nutshell out of the window. 'I've not much to complain of,' he concluded. 'Let's go upstairs.'

He rose with an effort, breaking the spell upon him, and came across to her. Helena meant to move, and found, in that instant, that his fingers grasped her arm.

'If I could ever hope,' he said in a quiet voice, absent almost, 'that you would listen to me once—no more——'

He paused, attentive. He had caught a movement above. As they stood in silence, side by side, a door above opened, and Mrs. Shovell, who had put all the roses in water, long since, and grown impatient, ran downstairs.

As she entered, Helena recoiled slightly, but John did not move or change countenance. It was not his habit to avoid criticism,—he walked over it or rode it down. He went on holding Miss Falkland's arm for three seconds, and dropped it easily. It was Violet's countenance that changed.

'If you want to see baby before——' she began thoughtfully, her eyes on John.

'Of course,' cried Helena, and disappeared, in no time, from the room. After that, it grew more difficult. Mr. Ingestre put on all the arrogance he could muster, but it barely sufficed. The mistress of the house was very much on her dignity too.

'Well?' he enquired at last, as she did not speak, arranging some of her white roses on the table.

'Were you rehearsing just now?' she demanded crisply.

'I was,' said Johnny. 'For a scene that'll never come off.'

'I'm serious, John.'

'So am I, Violet,—uncommonly serious. Will you coach her in her part?'

'Certainly not, if it's flirting.' She flushed and flashed on him suddenly. 'And let me tell you, John, if it's that, you've cast her wrong. She's not a person to flirt with, never would be. You'd do better to leave her alone.'

'You're quite right.' John laughed and approached her. 'Keep your temper, little girl,' he said lower. 'All's well, on my word,—never was better. I'm going now.'

He had his grandest manner, and with it a serenity that baffled her. He seemed inwardly radiant, as at the solution of some long-guarded problem: that look in the discoverer that seems to exclaim, 'Of course!'

Violet let herself be drawn as far as the outer door, and stood with him a minute on the threshold, biting her lip. To be mastered by brute force, and a superior manner, when you are morally in the right, is rather hard to bear: but Johnny's best friends had to suffer it frequently.

'Hadn't she been crying?' she said.

'Yes. She's no actress, and we had to tell her so. We've been trampling on her hopes, these last two days. You go and be nice to her, see?'

'John—is that really all? Honour?'

'All that concerns her.'

'And you?'

'Never you mind.' An interval. 'Anything more?' he asked.

'I should like to ask another,' said Violet, 'but I think I won't.'

'I think you'd better n't,' said Johnny carefully. 'You go and look after your kid.'

'After that, I just shall!' she said. Johnny winced, and stood at bay. She had him at her mercy for an instant. 'Will you give me my spoons?' she said mildly. 'They're still in your pocket,—the other side. That's all.'

Turning away from the door, Mrs. Shovell went back to the dining-room, and restored the spoons, with unnecessary precision, to their places on the dismantled table.

'That's what his father meant, then,' she reflected. 'Him at least,—if it should be both! And I introduced them,—*and* her mother,—mercy!'

II

It need hardly be stated, to those intelligent persons who have followed our drama so far, that, as the situation defined itself, the Ingestres were the first, and the Falklands the last, to take account of it: nor that Helena's mother was the last of all.

The fact was, Mrs. Falkland was quite puzzled, almost dazed, among Helena's innumerable and ardent admirers, who seemed to spring up, that season, wherever the girl went. One really could not pick out one, among so many, still less one whose wife Mrs. Falkland had determined to cherish among her dearest friends. Young Mrs. Ingestre was so completely 'nice' that no one could have doubts of her household, and Mrs. Falkland grew used to the chaffing tone in which everybody—even his wife—alluded

to Mr. John. Further, there could be no doubt he was an important and attractive person: and her respect for John's abstract importance was increased by the fact that, when she called upon Ursula, he was never there.

As for the rest of the small Falkland circle, the Captain went out with his women-folk very little, Quentin still less, Helena's married sister was completely wrapped up in her own affairs,—and Harold, who saw everything, said nothing at all.

Meanwhile the Ingestres kept their eyes open, being astonishingly open-eyed by nature in such cases, and having had plenty of such cases to study.

'Who's that pretty girl?' said Johnny's grandmother to him, in the Park. They were driving, on a Saturday afternoon, and had chanced to pass Miss Falkland and Mr. Auberon, walking on the path.

'Miss Helena Falkland,' said Johnny distinctly: for his grandmother, at something over eighty-five, was growing a little deaf.

'Introduce me to her,' said the dowager, her eye lightening: and stopped the carriage.

Until they met Helena, Johnny had been cross. He hated driving, and did not care for his grandmother; but he had been commandeered. Mrs. Ingestre, who regarded the new generation as young children, naturally, thought it would be nice for John and Ursula to come in the carriage with her, and called for them at four o'clock. Ursula was not at home,—Johnny was,—and could not think, on the spur of the minute, of a good enough excuse. Mrs. Ingestre would have seen through any but an excuse of genius, and Johnny's genius, for the minute, failed him.

He told her the truth, in consequence,—that he was working: and she laughed in his face. Johnny, besides the historical researches he conducted for his private amusement, managed the larger of his father's two estates, with its miles of productive farm-land in Yorkshire, with great ability, and saved his father yearly at least half his

own income. But since he had neglected his duties, and outraged his relations' best feelings, during the years preceding his majority, half of them had never discovered that he had any practical qualities at all, and his grandmother—to whom he remained simply a naughty boy—scoffed at them openly. So he had to leave his accounts in the middle, contain his objurgations, sit in his grandmother's carriage facing her bonnet and waving feathers, and submit to her piercing and disapproving scrutiny at intervals.

It was Johnny's generation Mrs. Ingestre disapproved of, more than of himself. Personally, he had a few advantages. To begin with, he was the only member of the family who invariably made her hear. He also not infrequently amused her, though she never showed it. It was beneath Mrs. Ingestre's dignity to look amused. He also cut a figure before the world, and compelled attention,—both good things. But he had been spoiled,—his mother had spoiled him. His generation was to blame for some of his deficiencies, but his mother was the most in fault.

Mrs. Ingestre had brought up her own children with the extreme of old-fashioned severity, the daughters yet more than the sons. The daughters she bullied most had been the plain ones, whereas her orphan niece, educated with her own family, had been considered, if not indulged. This niece, Violet Shovell's mother, had become one of the reigning beauties of her generation : which note leads us directly to the solitary weakness of Mrs. Ingestre, the same that had led her to distinguish Helena Falkland in the Park. She adored feminine beauty, especially of a certain conquering type, and was easily vanquished by it.

'That's one of the golden-fleece order of women,' she said, when she had been presented, conversed with Helena sufficiently, and dismissed her,—or allowed her to depart from her presence. 'Do you know what I mean by that?' She fixed her grandson with her needle-like eyes.

'I suppose,' said Johnny, 'you mean many Jasons come in quest of her. It's a fact.'

'You know your Shakespeare,' said Mrs. Ingestre, softening slightly. She had sunk long since, sixty years before, the actress in the great lady; but occasionally Johnny's reproduction of her youthful talent touched her.

'That was not all I meant,' she said, 'but it enters into it. When Shakespeare talked in another place of golden lads and girls, he meant that kind.'

'Did he?' said Johnny. His eyes strayed after Helena. 'Perhaps he did.'

'Do you admire her?' said Mrs. Ingestre.

'Rather!' said Johnny, with false warmth—very well done.

Unluckily, his grandmother was not easy to deceive. Also, she was an incorrigible gossip, and had probably been hearing things. During the pause, she took up her glass to examine him. This was not necessary, since he was close to her, and her vision quite unimpaired: but she happened to know he disliked it. Consequently, it was good for him. It was on educational principles of this sort that Mrs. Ingestre and her daughter-in-law disagreed.

Having made John change colour and glare at her, as she expected, and having thought, privately, what a good-looking boy he was, the dowager proceeded.

'Who's the cavalier?'

'He's a young Auberon,—one of the same set. Ursula knows the family.'

'Respectable, then. Well-off?'

'Eldest son of a general in our Eastern service,' said Johnny. 'Lakhs of rupees behind him, and shinning up the War Office, or one of those places, fast.'

'He looked presentable,' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'Is he engaged to her?'

'Not that I have heard,' said Johnny.

'If he is not,' said Mrs. Ingestre, 'her mother should not let him walk with her, in public, in the Park.'

'We passed her mother a minute afterwards,' said Johnny. 'She probably had Miss Falkland on a leash, if we had seen.'

'Don't be pert!' snapped Mrs. Ingestre. 'I did not observe you bow to the mother, John.'

'You did not, Grandmamma,—because I don't know her. Ursula does.'

'Isn't it the same thing?' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'In my day, a man was on bowing terms with his wife's acquaintance. And she with his.'

Johnny thought of several possible answers to this, among others the simple one of telling her that she lied. But, Miss Falkland being by this time out of sight, he felt too dispirited to attempt it; so he only lounged on the seat with his head on his hand, profoundly disliking his circumstances.

'Sit up!' said Mrs. Ingestre,—so sharply that he did so. 'How long have you known that girl?'

'What's that to you?' Johnny nearly said: luckily he did not. One cannot say such things to one's grandmother. The mistake is, to have one at all. 'About three months,' he answered.

'She has an uncommon pretty colour,' said the dowager grimly.

'Mean that was my fault?' drawled Johnny, opening his eyes right at her,—he could since he was sitting up.

It was a good move, and shook her a little: but nothing would shake her off the scent. 'You're your father's son,' she said, more grimly than ever, 'but you needn't imagine you can get round me. You've been dangling after that girl.'

'Dangling,' Johnny repeated, debating the word. His grandmother was always taking exception to his words, so occasionally he picked out one of hers. At least it produced a pause in the dialogue, and it was safe to annoy. Indeed, Mrs. Ingestre's main desire was to box his ears when he did it: but in the face of her best acquaintance

in the Park, the desire could not be gratified. So she swallowed her wrath and went on.

‘Where have you met her, eh?’

‘Most places,’ said Johnny, bored. ‘I’ve danced with her in about six houses,—is that dangling? Miss Falkland dances rather decently, so we haven’t talked much. They really don’t leave you time nowadays,—do they?’

This was really a happy diversion. The picture of Mrs. Ingestre attending dances,—modern dances,—was so pert, not to say profane, in its conception, that she had to abandon her rôle of inquisitor forthwith, and put John in his place. She also made a note of telling his father that his home education had not been sufficiently attended to between the ages of eleven and sixteen. It was during those years of growth, according to Mrs. Ingestre, that, granted a parent of energy and spirit, a lasting impression could be made.

Johnny listened to her lecture languidly, storing bits to use against her at a future time. He wondered at intervals what people meant by talking of the beauty of age: he had never seen a sign of it in his own family. It is true, he was thoroughly out of temper, because the old beast had snapped at Helena. Also, she had reduced his own spirits to a minimum, as she always did: an hour of her company was enough to make him wish he had not been born. There was something unnatural about her, he decided, no doubt because, in the strict ways of nature, she should have been dead long since. Long dead—Johnny’s eyes widened as he watched the dusty trees of the Park and pondered it. She was like a vampire nowadays, living on the life of others. . . . This last thought encouraged him so much that he survived to the end of the afternoon without insulting her openly. He did not want to do that.

As for Mrs. Ingestre, she had been a little confused by the rapidity and versatility of his accomplished changes; but she was used to the type through fifty years’ hard

experience, and though confused, she was not contented. She declined obstinately to be contented with John, in the matter of the pretty Falkland girl ; and she went home to tell the family about it.

The fact that Mrs. Falkland, on the same occasion, was contented thoroughly, may indicate the differences in parental perception that exist.

'Who was that stopped to speak to you, dear?' said Mrs. Falkland, when her young pair returned to her side after their stroll. Helena's growing friendship for Quentin was one of the anchors to which Mrs. Falkland clung in the fretting tide of youth's uncertainties. She always liked to see them enter on a discussion,—that had been the reason of the stroll,—even when they talked about things she did not understand. So she asked the question with a benign smile, and Helena informed her.

'Really?' said Mrs. Falkland, her maternal thoughts flitting instantly to Harold. 'We had just been remarking on the beautiful horses,—hadn't we, dear?'—to Harold.

'No,' said Harold, accurate but unheeded.

'Had you met her before?' said Mrs. Falkland.

'No,' said Helena. 'That is, she had not met me before, as was obvious. I knew *her* perfectly well,—she is *the* dreadful old lady, the deaf one that sits in front of all the concerts: and the same Mrs. Shovell was reading the programme to, the first time we saw her at Regent's Hall.'

'Jove, so she is,' said Harold.

'Did you mention that?' said Mrs. Falkland, looking Helena anxiously up and down, to be sure not a stitch was out of place, on this momentous occasion. She looked particularly brilliant, and happy too.

'Good gracious no, Mother dear. She is pulverising. Even Mr. Auberon was frightened,—yes, you were.'

'What did you say?' pressed her mother.

'I said yes, and no, and thank you, and good-bye. I only hope I said them in the proper places. Mr. Ingestre

did the talking, luckily,—I was shaking in my shoes. . . . Oh yes,' said Helena, recollecting. 'I said I knew Mrs. Shovell, hoping to calm her, because really she was sweet to her, that concert day. But Mrs. Ingestre only looked me up and down, and sniffed.'

'Perhaps that was a compliment,' suggested Quentin. 'She was comparing you.'

'Well, I only hope she settled to like me finally,' said Helena. 'She had not that appearance.'

'I should not wonder, now, if we get a card,' said Mrs. Falkland thoughtfully. Helena was now on bowing terms with the father and grandmother, and terms perhaps a little beyond bowing with the son. She herself saw the son's wife pretty constantly. There really only remained the father's wife, Mr. John's own mother; and Mrs. Falkland heard on all hands that she hardly counted, since she was always ill.

She little knew how much the remaining Mrs. Ingestre of the three counted in the case. Agatha had, sooner or later, the confidence of everybody, including her son.

Everyone but Ursula, that is. No art, or at least no art of hers, could extract confidence from Ursula. Agatha had alienated Ursula, not long after her marriage, by a bit of very sage maternal advice, well considered in advance, cleverly and clearly administered. A little too clearly, as it proved. Ursula had been desperately offended at the time, and as usual, instead of speaking her sentiments either to his mother or John, had let the grudge rankle, and shut her lips. Since the difference concerned himself, Johnny had never been able to track its origin. His mother was plain-spoken, as he knew, but he could not suppose she intended insult to Ursula: and since it was his mother, of the two, who steadily assured him she had been in the wrong, he was the more convinced of it. Being mightily bored with the quarrel, when it had lasted a couple of years, he conveyed to Ursula that, whatever it

was, it would be graceful in her, as the younger and stronger woman, to make peace. Ursula replied that there were some things that women never forgive, and refrained, with a righteous and visible effort, from further explanation.

Now, on her arrival from the country, where she had been passing the spring in peace, Agatha noted once more the signs of disruption in her turbulent household, and began, from her couch in the corner of the drawing-room, which she seldom left in these days, to gather in the evidence, quietly.

She suffered her mother-in-law's unvarnished opinions, and accepted the assurance that, had she not pampered that boy persistently through his childhood, they would not have these anxieties about him now. Agatha, who laid the whole trouble of Johnny, with obvious justice, to his father's over-rigorous discipline in early manhood, silently accepted the reproaches. She did not argue with the old lady often, unless Johnny were there as her spokesman : she had neither the vivacity requisite, nor the voice. She let her talk, and listened with attention, for she had immense and varied experience, and was very acute. It was Agatha's duty, she learnt, for Ursula's sake, to let Helena's parents know the state of things. The girl was obviously beautiful enough to turn a stronger head than John's, and there was no time to be lost in consequence. That the parents were rank idiots not to see, on their own account, was passingly implied, but Mrs. Ingestre made allowances for them. Everybody knew how stupid Army people were, and it was likely that, flattered by the connection, their eyes were blinded. As a lesson to them, Mrs. Ingestre would have been tempted to let things take their natural course : but little Ursula was a good girl, and her age barely three-and-thirty,—quite a child,—and John, also a child, but by no means a good one, might be brought to see his duty still, if his mother only kept her place, and let his father deal with him, as was suitable.

Johnny's mother smiled at the ancient phrase, but was careful to make no commentary.

She had her husband also, not once, but many times, snapping at all suggestions, and vacillating between two views. Now contemptuous because, with 'the lad,' such things were smoke without fire, invariably : now resentful because, should the idea take hold of him, he could not be trusted to keep within decent bounds. The latter, since he returned to it, caused him the more genuine anxiety. He admitted, shadowing his mother's attitude, that Johnny's relations with his wife were at a 'ticklish' stage; and the mere fact of this little red-haired girl's existence, within the four-mile radius, might precipitate matters, alienate the couple beyond redemption, and deprive the family of all hope of the longed-for heir.

Agatha suffered less willingly certain dear friends of Ursula's, who made their moan to her, very delicately, about her patience, her forbearance, and her increasingly lonely life : how she gave her time and devotion more and more to useful works, and how women's clubs and societies, in all directions, blessed her name.

'Did she see no men?' was Agatha's rather testy query, having heard a good deal of the sort : and so learnt that Ursula had made a new friend, or rather remade an old one, in Mr. Auberon,—quite a young man, twenty-four at most.

'Bother,' thought Agatha privately, 'that's no good.' She would have thought better of Ursula if she had flirted openly, to retaliate on John. That would have shown not only spirit, but policy. But the 'acolyte' system annoyed her, as did all half-hearted courses. Agatha had instinctively placed her daughter-in-law as a dabbler, even in virtue, long before.

She had Mrs. Shovell too, once, for the hour before dinner, her most peaceful period. She compared notes with her young cousin at leisure, and found, not for the first time, their opinions identical upon Ursula and John.

They agreed that it all depended on the girl, and the girl being immature, though Violet spoke warmly for her disposition, could not be counted upon. Violet herself had no idea of Helena's own sentiments,—‘except that she loves to be in his company,’ she added. ‘But then so do you, and so do several other ladies, Cousin Agatha.’

They agreed further that warning the Falklands was equally undignified and futile: and trying to sermonise John, at the present stage, only one degree less rash than trying to terrorise him.

‘You don’t think anyone has attempted that?’ said Agatha anxiously, well knowing who ‘anyone’ would be. ‘Very well, my dear: we can get no further. Go, for goodness’ sake, and play me something really ancient and obvious, to rest my brain, until the bell.’

So Violet played, her frequent office in that house: and peace reigned in Agatha’s world till seven o’clock, when all the disputant branches of the Ingestre family, including the defaulting heir, his grandmother, his father, one of his plain aunts, and his wife, drifted into the drawing-room, one by one, and sat down under the spell of the ancient and obvious music, ‘their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze,’ and their behaviour, for the time being, irreproachable. They looked quite pleasant, even Ursula: and the resemblance between Johnny, his father, and his grandmother, under this calming influence, struck Agatha forcibly. The men’s attitude was even identical, to a finger, unconsciously.

‘She must have worked at that a bit,’ Ursula confided suddenly to her husband, who was nearest.

‘Just as if her little hands were centipedes,’ agreed Johnny dreamily: and his father, sitting next beyond him, laughed.

Within ten minutes of the closing of the piano, of course, the millennium ceased: and soon they were all snapping again, quite comfortably: but the truce was worth a remark in passing. Mrs. Shovell herself took no further

part in the controversy ; for having been informed by the eldest Mrs. Ingestre that she could not have kept up her execution to that point without neglecting her home duties : and by the youngest Mrs. Ingestre that Scarlatti, being delicate and distinguished and a few other things, was not really suited to her style : she embraced the real and only Mrs. Ingestre in her retired corner, and went home to her husband.

Last, and not least, his mother had John. He came to her that same evening before he left, in her own room upstairs : having been, as he passingly mentioned, kicked out below.

‘ From which department ? ’ said Agatha.

‘ Father’s. The drawing-room is placid temporarily, since Granny is asleep. Ursula is learning a new crochet stitch,’ added Johnny, ‘ and can’t be disturbed. There really seems nobody left, to speak of, Mother.’

‘ Sit down, dear,’ said Agatha. ‘ Smoke if you want to, and tell me what your father said.’

‘ I haven’t an idea,’ said Johnny, sitting down. ‘ I can’t listen to genealogies for ever. And ours is a particularly tricky one, to judge by the way Father swore in reproducing it. If I was a fishmonger or a—a missionary,’ said Johnny, looking at the ceiling, ‘ I might be allowed to drink my claret after dinner in peace. As it is, I’ve had a hell of an evening. Sorry, Mother,—the dinner was good.’

‘ I’m glad the dinner was good,’ said Agatha.

‘ The one thing that interested me,’ said Johnny, turning sidelong in his chair, which proved a good one,—and realising, as he did so, its extreme possibilities of comfort, with no sacrifice of grace,—‘ was, that if I choose to wreck—I think that’s the word—my improbable son’s chances on the estates, and my father’s ideals of virtuous living by the way,—sorry, Mother,—Shovell’s probable son comes into the running. Did you know that ? ’

'No,' said Agatha. 'Nor do they, certainly.'

'Of course it's the elder branch,—but I'd no idea the last two generations had played the fool to that extent, all the same. I'd never thought it out. I shall certainly outlive—always granted I don't blow my brains out—the two excellent persons Father mentioned,—can't think why excellence and ill-health always go together—beastly sorry, Mother, I don't mean you. There are nothing but bad lives in all directions,—and Felicia's son, the only one strong enough to outlive me, is illegitimate. That's a jolly state of things for Father to contemplate among the wine-glasses, isn't it, Mother?'

'He is very unhappy about you,' said Agatha.

'No—you are,' said Johnny. 'Father's unhappy about the property. You're very unhappy about me, aren't you, Mother?'

'Very, my dear,—have been for long.'

'Aren't you more, lately, like the rest of them? *Aren't* you? That's really very clever of you not to be.'

'Why?' said Agatha, watching him.

'Why d'you think? Because I'm happy, for the first time in my life. I'm beginning—just beginning—to see what happiness means.'

She said nothing, but she saw the strange light in his face, the same, doubtless, that Violet had seen; then, and later, as he paced smoking about the room. She could see with the inner eye, the mother's, his life gathering up, centring round a purpose again. He was charging himself, as he had charged once before, to blast all obstacles, from man or god, to his heart's desire. He had always done that, from childhood: staked the whole of himself in cases where the commoner mind stakes half:—and suffered in proportion when deprived of his dream.

'It's some way off,' he observed to himself, 'but I see the colour of it. Do you know the colour of happiness, Mother? Granny told me once,—Shakespeare mentions it,—it's gold.'

'And how much of other people's gold is worth spending to get yours?' said Agatha.

'That's the point,' he agreed. 'That's what I'm wondering all the time. Not all the time,' he corrected, 'now and then. It'd be rotten waste to wonder all the time.'

'Not just now, for instance.' She smiled as he glanced round at her. 'Come here, John.'

'Are you going to scold me?' he enquired, smiling too; as confident in his power over her, as he had been at ten years old. He came to be scolded, as he had then, sure of his ultimate victory, however vexed she was.

'Listen,' she said, entering his mood, as he knelt down by her. 'Will you show her to me?'

'Yes,—I will,' said Johnny. 'She doesn't think about me, you know,' he added quickly. 'I rather think she's got another kind of man. She's a little girl, Mother,—sort you'd like. Not clever, you know, like Violet,—don't you go saying clever things.'

'I won't,' promised Agatha. He had told her just in this manner, and this voice, about his first love, when he was sixteen.

'Likely my dear friends tell her things about me,' murmured Johnny. 'Friends are safe for that. Mind you don't let on too much when you talk to her,—d'you hear?'

'I'll be careful,' said Agatha. 'There would not be much, anyhow, that I could find to say.'

'Wouldn't there? Mean you wouldn't take away my character—give me away when I wasn't looking? Sure?'

He was wielding her, of course, disgracefully; with that old confidence, and this new power to help, he could almost lead her whither he would. Not quite, for the oldest power of all was hers.

'I'm sure at least she's very lovely,' she said. 'And I rather suspect she's good.'

'Hopelessly good,' said Johnny instantly. 'Church, and all that. She'll go to heaven with Ursula, and so on.'

Not a chance for me anywhere,—not even beyond the grave.'

He did not think it, though: he had a strong inborn faith in his chances, she could see by his eyes. And of course he wanted her to agree with him, it was her business: but Agatha did not agree. She waited instead, guarding his head close to her with her thin hand; not caressing, she was not a woman who caressed. She had defended him, at her own risk, often: and would so defend him, at the worst, to the end.

'Why don't you talk, Mother?' he said presently, when he had talked a good deal, in the vein.

'I was thinking of what you said. Do you think in your sober mind, John, that Ursula is good?'

'Of course I do.' He looked at her suspiciously. 'Ursula's the virtuous woman, the very type. Where are you getting to, Mother?'

'Not so very far, I think. Is Ursula so remote from the point?'

Johnny flushed. 'She's not good enough to release me,' he said restlessly. 'She'd never let me go. That's the only way Ursula's goodness can come into it, that I can see. She'd cling like a leech—bleeding me.'

He had a premonitory shudder: and again, Agatha saw it through his eyes. She had also, in her long pondering for him, reached this speculation, if not the image he used,—that was overdone. But that Ursula's excellently feminine methods were actual torment to him, she had never doubted. Ursula weighed upon him deliberately, with her whole weight,—had done so from the first. Silent and insatiable—not un-leech-like really—she laid claim to every part of him, body and brain, while guarding her aloof cool manner. Granted Johnny, that was very clever, thought Agatha,—but she despised it. The posture claimed all, and risked nothing,—Ursula at once threatened him by it, and saved herself,—the franker fighting breed of womanhood revolted instinctively.

'You're wild,' she said quietly. 'It's not all mothers would hear such things. Suppose I kicked you out as well.'

'You wouldn't. You never would,' he said.

'Not if you offended me?'

'Offended?' He was astonished.

'I'm a wife as well as a mother, Johnny. So I must feel for her.'

'But—it's not the same,' argued Johnny. 'It's *not*,—shut up.'

'Why not? Do you think I was never anxious, when I was Ursula's age?'

'Oh,—dash it, Mother!' He protested, drawing off from her. He was almost shocked.

'It's to the point. And I had you to console me, remember that. There have been times when I've wondered what I should do without you, I could always turn to you. When Ursula begins to look——'

She was allowed to get no further, for he seized and silenced her forcibly. He had flushed and changed countenance while she was speaking. Now he had enough.

'I'm going,' he said roughly, rising. 'I didn't bargain for this. As if I hadn't enough—without——' He stared, not at, but round his mother, withering her with his haughtiest look. Agatha was prepared for this stage as well: he could never be drawn more than a certain distance. She shot her last shaft serenely after him.

'You're just like your father at this minute, dear.'

Johnny, muttering something disrespectful to both, turned his shoulder, and reached the door. 'You're giving Father away,' he pointed out from this distance, 'when you draw morals like that. I never cared for morals much,—so it's hardly worth risking.'

'Risking? Risking what?' No answer. 'Disloyalty? My splendid son!' She laughed wearily. 'Ursula would never be so disloyal to you,' she said.

He bit his lip,—he was not so sure of it. It would have been convenient to assert that his wife would never venture

so far within his domain, as his mother had ventured in hers, but he was cut off that resource as well. His mother was teasing him terribly,—meant to tease, what was worse. She meant to take the breeze out of his swelling sails,—put him out in the first fine exaltation of this new campaign. It was her privilege to do so, since he could not quarrel with her. She watched him, attentive, unsmiling, as he stood by the door: unable of course to leave her, though he wished to, trying almost visibly to shake off those unpleasant darts she had planted. But he could not recover his contentment: the moment of greatest glory was gone.

He offered her good-night, finally, in the same brusque overbearing fashion,—just like his father, with a difference: the difference she loved. She was sure by his looks that he was still at war internally, she had given him at least to think. She had done wrong to stir such troublesome preoccupations naturally. Her behaviour was disappointing, and he let her see it; but he did not reproach her further. He even condescended to pity her, as she lay before him, fragile and worn.

‘Poor Mother,’ he said.

Agatha said—‘Dear boy,’ when she kissed him: she knew she must not call him poor, though her spirit was indignant, yearning over him, all the time. ‘I’ve been taking advantage, haven’t I?’ she murmured.

‘Yes,’ said Johnny with decision. The drawback to having your mother for a friend is that she does take advantage: and you cannot say the expressive, full-blown things to her that you can to other real friends when they so behave; above all to a mother such as this, with a fatal hand grasping her that no vigorous young strength can snatch away.

‘Have I been beastly to you?’ he asked. ‘Made you tired?’

‘No,’ she said in her weak tone, as she held him fast, ‘you never tire me as others do. One thing only,—never

talk of killing yourself, even in jest, John. That is the one thing your mother cannot bear.'

'All right,' he said seriously. 'But you needn't bother,—you can be pretty sure I never would. I'm jolly theatrical—and flashy—and common—Father used all those words to-night: but the last act won't finish like that. Shouldn't wonder if I was found in slippers in the last act, wretched as they make 'em, nursing the estate. . . . I'll try not to run a dinner-knife into Father either,' said Johnny as an after-thought, 'but that's harder to say. He ought to be more careful with the words he chooses, when knives are lying about. I'm not common, Mother, am I?'

He concentrated the whole of his wiles upon her without warning,—he had been flirting his finest through the greater part of this interview.

'No indeed,' laughed Agatha. 'You'd be far less anxiety to us all if you were. There now,' she added, after a little nonsense. 'I hear your father, and Ursula will be waiting. Better go.'

III

It was as well Agatha spoke while she could, for her usual fate intervened, and she was finally debarred from doing more. Agatha was not fated ever to behold the beautiful 'golden girl' of her son's passionate dream. The day Helena and her mother passed her threshold for the first time, she was incapable of talking to the girl, of looking at her even. Ursula, as often before, was summoned to do the honours in her place.

Ursula, on these frequent, increasingly frequent, occasions, rose to her part in admirable style. Indeed, many good critics compared her favourably, in manners and social deportment, with her mother-in-law. Agatha was accounted 'original' and somewhat brusque. She showed her preferences markedly, and could not tolerate certain

types at all. Ursula was equable and gracious to all alike, and disturbed nobody by brilliant or biting observations. She looked what she was, a handsome and agreeable young woman, well trained on the right lines, sure of herself, and thoroughly competent in her part. She had, as recognised hostess, a little pedestal that suited her, from which she could look down on all rivals. This added dignity soothed away her habitual sense of grievance, temporarily: and her father-in-law, as ever in front of the world, treated her with marked attention and deference, emphasising her position to all.

She crushed Helena easily. The girl, natural and gentle, could not stand before her pose, the well-chosen elaboration of her appearance, the well-weighed condescension of her address. When it came to assumption, Helena was nowhere beside Ursula, as she proved. Nor could John, in his father's presence, and his father's house, venture to outstep the prescribed limitations. On these premises, Johnny found himself caught in the toils of tradition inevitably, and designated, do what he would, as a prince beside the throne. His father carried that atmosphere about with him, and under the eye of that inner ring, that better-than-aristocratic society which was his father's world, it was useless to ignore it, for all his internal chafing. Thus unfairly was he entrapped to-day. He dared not even look at his young divinity too markedly: and she was lovelier than usual, in creamy white with a black hat, like the richest of the summer lilies with which Agatha had filled the corners of the staircase,—the kind that wear gold-dust on their ivory leaves. Wherever she moved, she stood in a gold mist for him, as though the same beam clung to her which, creeping through the narrow windows of his father's hall, had picked her out for its blessing when she first came in. She drew all eyes,—and his alone must not follow her. It was infuriating, almost as much so as when he had had to neglect her for Jill before.

'Mr. Ingestre is a very fine gentleman, isn't he?' said

Mrs. Falkland, when Helena, who had strayed to greet a few friends on entering, returned to her side.

'Yes,' said Helena. 'Oh—which do you mean?'

'Yours,' said Mrs. Falkland, innocently.

Mrs. Falkland had been impressed by Johnny, quite unintentionally on his part. Happening to be at Ursula's elbow when Mrs. Falkland reached her side, he could not avoid the long-delayed introduction. The new arrival was handed to him, in the natural course of things, and, duty-bound, he took her on for ten minutes, being one of the few strangers in the house. His thoughts were exclusively occupied, during the period of his dialogue, by the strict necessity of watching for his mother's doctor on the staircase, and the savage determination to outwit and forestall his father in the ensuing interview. It was his one chance, since otherwise his father would never let him know the things he wanted. His father, twenty feet off, was contemplating the same thing,—that is, outwitting and defeating Johnny. Father and son were each entertaining a woman; and the occasional lowering glances cast at one another across the heads of the indifferent who divided them, would have suggested at once to anyone who knew them, something of the state of things. Eventually Johnny—having the older and less attractive woman in charge—scored, dodged round the staircase head, and captured the doctor; the while Mrs. Falkland remained sublimely impervious, alike to the situation and to the by-play.

Real manners, she explained to Helena,—proud, as one would expect, but attentive—entertaining—quite above the average—and matching his wife's style so remarkably. Finding Helena had no response to her panegyric, Mrs. Falkland added that certainly his eyebrows looked bad-tempered, more so than his father's—who had such a beautiful smile. Helena, at that, was moved to speak, the colour dawning in her face.

'They are anxious, I think,' said Helena. 'His mother is worse again, Lord Dering says.'

'Which is Lord Dering?' said Mrs. Falkland, happily diverted.

'Don't you know him, Mother dear?' said Helena.

'Lord,—don't you know *him*?' said Harold.

'No,' said their mother, with firmness, 'and I wish to, if you please.'

She addressed herself to Helena, since Harold, in such a case, was useless. Mrs. Falkland, needless to say, had arrived at this 'fashionable' stronghold full-armed for the conflict. If Helena, in her easy passage past its defences, picked up an earl, it was Mrs. Falkland's simple duty to know him, and at once. She could not have Helena knowing earls—and young earls—at nineteen, all alone: it was ridiculous. As it was, the girl was constantly getting what Harold mischievously called 'off-side' in the matter of introductions, but in the case of a Lord Dering it was not to be tolerated. So, having scaled Johnny to her satisfaction, Mrs. Falkland, manœuvring in capable style, surrounded and captured Bertram,—who had succeeded his grandfather and taken a wife in the same year, profoundly deploring both necessities. After these feats, Mrs. Falkland took breath, rested on her laurels, and told Harold to get her a cup of tea.

Helena, having settled her mother in a comfortable corner, wandered, free once more. It was a beautiful house, smaller than the Falkland mansion but better-designed, and arranged with a kind of graceful austerity, like everything Agatha's hand had ever touched. A woman's house conveys her character to a woman's eye. Helena, the little outsider, looked about her, and shyly took it in. She had so often wondered about his mother, as anyone must, knowing him. She had looked forward to the meeting, with an unconscious faith in such a mother's piloting,—but it was not to be. Instead, she fell back on her own resources, looked at the flowers and the furniture, and speculated, dreamed. Without, one of the astonishingly hot days of that season glared brassily across London:

within all was freshness, cordial composure, shadowed ease. No wonder he loved her, thought Helena, and looked absent and strained like that when she was suffering.

She speculated a little about her society too, though not much: she was just conscious of a sense of adventure, discovery,—those senses beloved of youth,—concerning them. Most of the people present she had heard of, or watched in the distance, but not met face to face. Helena had little of her mother's social enterprise, and cared nothing for securing attention,—having already more than she could do with,—but her circumstances amused her.

She fell into the hands, first, of her host, who took her in charge in a flattering manner of ceremony, and introduced her to all the right people, one by one; and then into the hands of young Mr. Shovell, Violet's husband, who introduced her to all the amusing people, right or wrong,—he seemed as indifferent as Helena. Smiling faces, on all sides, were turned on the little beauty: men and women alike spared her special notice and regard, and she made several new conquests of whose worth she was not the least aware, since her thoughts were turned upon other things. The society figures formed and melted about her: the game played itself decorously, for quite a time: but she was increasingly conscious of disillusion, hope deferred, glory staled, something wanting to an occasion upon which she had unaware built much, round which she had long been weaving dreams.

Then, just as she was resigning herself to departure and disappointment, in a retired corner of the hall, she found John at her elbow, and heard, with an inner start of rapture, his pleasant voice.

'My mother sends her regrets to you specially, Miss Falkland,' said Johnny. 'She is very anxious to know you, she says.'

'She is very good,' said Helena, glowing in her pretty way. She could never speak a commonplace as others did,

he had noticed, she felt the commonest things too much. Only—a dozen watchful eyes saw her blush and gleam in talking to him, which is what in society is called ‘unfortunate.’

‘Coming to the concert to-morrow night?’ said John, resting a careless hand against the staircase rail to screen her.

‘No,’ said Helena. ‘I can’t afford any more concerts.’

‘Afford?’ said Johnny, astonished. ‘Come with me.’ An interval. ‘Perhaps you can’t afford that either. I assure you, Miss Falkland, at a symphony concert, butter wouldn’t melt in my mouth. Ask my cousin.’ Pause again. ‘I simply say “how pretty” at intervals.’ Pause once more, Helena smiling, her head averted. ‘I’d say it oftener if you came,’ said Johnny, looking at the dimple in her cheek. ‘You see, I’m going with Grandmamma,—who’s not.’

‘I’m afraid it’s impossible,’ said Helena firmly, still looking away from him. She supposed she ought to walk away firmly as well. She was considering the question, evidently, the smile still curving her lip, her white dress brushing the lilies in the staircase corner, its purity endangered by their gold.

‘I want four, and five, and nine, at the Weyburns’ on Wednesday night,’ said Johnny, having looked all round him under his eyelids once. His father was in sight: but his father might go—wherever he was going, when Helena smiled like that.

‘Mr. Ingestre! Isn’t that rather excessive? Four perhaps—and nine.’ A glance dragged the second out of her.

‘I shall keep five,’ Johnny mentioned, ‘on the chance.’

‘And suppose I happen to be engaged for it?’

‘It’ll be a bore,’ admitted Johnny. ‘For the other man.’

The remainder of the dialogue was not in words. He had penned her in by the lilies, so of course she could not move. For years after, the scent of lilies touched Helena

with the magical languor of that hour, and possibly him also. Summer-time,—immortal, immemorial summer, first youth, first love : there is nothing like it anywhere, or ever again. Of course there is not, it is a commonplace : yet its unapproachable quality, its special sanctity, had never touched John before. It was that, really, the undefinable sense of that all about him, that baffled his own acting, shamed him eventually out of speech. He had trifled, of course, because he had to, and because he could barely find other language in a woman's vicinity : but it was not suitable to this woman for a moment, his cousin was right. It was not so Helena was made to be addressed, or approached. He would be better at her feet, far better, and his hand clutched the staircase rail, as though to save him from that more fitting attitude. His eyes flitted round him the while, fierce almost, and lowering. He would have liked, before all that chattering roomful, to stoop, kiss her garments, and apologise for so using her. As it was, she could only scorn him, little angel, equally with the contemptible crowd. He was worth no more to her, really, than they, never would be,—he must not be. And his mother, who could alone have linked them naturally, helped him to bear it, helpless herself, was in that room upstairs. The security her love and support had always lent him, seemed to have vanished, or to be slipping his grasp.

He turned on Helena, as though he would have spoken, but again, he did not : her aspect seemed to cut him off. But she felt his eyes on her, examining. He had that glance of late, faintly anxious, strange to her senses,—yet distrust could not stand before it. He might flirt, talk nonsense to her, as he did to other girls,—but he was not like that. She held him fast, all she had ever held, no strand of confidence loosened, tease he never so. Helena still had her benignant air, her dreamy eyes turned side-long past him, even that exquisite dimple, fading and reappearing under his gaze,—because he amused her, even at his silliest, he really did. . . .

Johnny swept her in, sweet sight that she was, angelic denizen of an infant world : he took one draught of the heavens closed to him, and swung about. Two seconds later he was talking agreeably to an aunt of Ursula's.

Mrs. Falkland accompanied her children, her two youngest and dearest, to Lady Weyburn's ball. It was a young dance, the elder Miss Weyburn's coming of age : but sure to be brilliant, since it was a house where many social high-roads crossed. Everybody, Mrs. Falkland flattered herself, would be there. She was in her usual complacent mood of the hen-mother of two strikingly successful chicks. Helena, of course, was the more conspicuous : she might be said to be passed, '*hors concours*,' by the best judges : a little languid and silent to-night, perhaps, but then it was a hot night, the season dragging to a close, and girls have their ups and downs. Helena would soon be in the country, and might quite well score a few more triumphs first.

As for Harold, it was true none but Mrs. Falkland knew his entire and exceptional inner worth, but anybody could see the bland perfection of his appearance. Not a stud, not a hair of Harold was ever out of place. His manners, his movements, his rare but well-chosen smiles, his ties and socks, were all the very thing,—there was no other word for it. He was not a commanding presence, like Mr. Auberon, nor theatrically good-looking, like Mr. Ingestre, nor ingratiating, like some of Helena's smart admirers, nor effervescent, like others. But then, how much to the point was everything he said ! Even the best people attended to Harold, when he chose to open his lips ; and he treated the happy girls whom he selected for partners to all kinds of odd sayings, elegant turns, and adroit attentions. Mrs. Falkland was quite jealous of them, at times.

Yet, oddly enough, Harold was silent too, this evening. What was more remarkable, though they arrived in good time, he sat down for the first dance, regardless of the

innumerable young ladies who, Mrs. Falkland was certain, were sighing for him on every side. However, since he sat it out near her, close at her elbow, she did not blame him for his behaviour, except playfully; and even then, Harold's face did not change. One single doubt she had, having noted his serious expression,—she asked him if anything at dinner had disagreed with him.

'No, mother,' said Harold—in a tone like Hamlet's: however, it relieved her mind completely.

Presently he leant back and made an observation: short, like all Harold's clever remarks. It appeared to concern his sister's dances,—pre-engagements,—what other girls did.

'Yes, dear,' said Mrs. Falkland, who was silently pricing the lace on Lady Weyburn's train.

'He hasn't even come!' said Harold.

'Who?' Mrs. Falkland left her calculation in the middle. She was pretty sure the lace, though beautiful, was less expensive than hers.

'Ingestre, of course,—who d'you suppose?'

'Haven't they? But I thought I saw her on the stairs. Perhaps it was someone doing her hair the same way: those coils are common.' She added,—'They're often late.'

'Takes precious good care to be,' muttered Harold.

'They might have been kept,' pursued Mrs. Falkland, in a tone of outrageous complacency, as though being kept, for such people, was a virtue! . . . 'There's Mrs. Shovell,' she proceeded, 'and Lord What's-his-name, and I've met that fair man too, only I can't lay hands on—— Really, dear, we know nearly everybody to-night.'

'Well, strikes me as a bit *infra dig.*, that's all,' said Harold, as though she had not spoken. 'Put herself at the mercy—cad like that.'

He spoke between his teeth, and his eyes were narrowed. It had rather a cutting effect, or would have had, only he spoke so low. He was too cautious,—his mother, still unwarned, was only faintly flustered at the term he used.

'Oh, my dear,—even if you dislike him——' She glanced quickly round her.

'Oh, he's jolly rich,' said Harold. 'I know.' He got up, rather wearily. 'All right, mother, leave it to you. It's only—some girls might, of course,—not her. It's—' he paused—'a matter of taste.'

With which, shortly after, he was gone, with his easy step, in the direction of the younger Miss Weyburn, a little plump simple-natured girl, of whom he was fond.

Mrs. Falkland continued flustered for a time. Taste! And in Harold's mouth,—that meant something. But what did he mean was tasteless,—what was wrong? Had he quarrelled with his sister? She could not conceive it, somehow. The understanding of the pair might be called elastic,—they snapped one another up rather sadly at meal-times,—but it was firm. Whenever Helena was attacked, or in difficulties,—neither thing happened very often,—inconspicuously, Harold was always at her side. He was quick and quiet to uphold her, at need, and very tough to dispose of. Even the clever Mr. Auberon found that.

Now, it seemed, he disapproved of something his sister had been doing, as regarded Mr. Ingestre: something, let us say, unwise. Mrs. Falkland had grown so used, by now, to Helena making her way unaided, that she was almost timid of meddling. Really, the girl had done so well for herself, all told, and had made her own position. Nothing was more marked than Helena's good sense, her happy influence, the order she maintained single-handed in her little court. What she called 'nonsense' made her impatient, she could not tolerate it. One or two really silly young men had been inclined to give trouble: various little intrigues and bickerings had come to Mrs. Falkland's ears. But always late: before she could grow anxious, Helena had laughed or reasoned them out of it, smoothed things over with a capable hand, and all was orderly about her steps again.

However, in matters of taste, the crystal standard of the moment, Mrs. Falkland put Harold in front of Helena, just. Harold was absolute,—the oracle. So, having cogitated the mystery for a short time, she called Helena to her side, and requested with mild gravity to look at her programme. She examined it a minute.

‘Whom does the cross stand for?’ she said, quite pleasantly. The short-hand the oracle Harold employed at dances amused her, and she was ready to take the young people’s habits as a joke. ‘Oh,—well, then, my dear, I think three’s too many. One’s enough, really, or—’ with a flitting vision of the fine gentleman Johnny, ‘two, to-night, let’s say, not to seem too pointed. But three’s too many—’ she handed the card back, her kind complacent eyes exploring the room—‘except to friends.’

Helena turned rather pale, but said nothing; which struck her mother as curious. When John, at the appointed hour, made his way to her through the throng, she looked in his face, still pale, and said—‘Would you mind sitting it out, Mr. Ingestre?’

‘I was about to ask you if you minded,’ he said. ‘I’m wanted at home,—I’ve only come for half an hour.’

He had come for her dance, then: timed it carefully: there was no mistaking the intention, thus confessed; and he was going back, she guessed, to his mother’s bedside afterwards. . . . It was like him to do it, that slight ‘sensational’ that clung to everything Johnny did. And yet, he was falsifying nothing. Life does offer drama, the clash of great sentiments, occasionally: and that it was the drama of life, Helena was certain by his face, while his tongue entertained her idly.

She went whither he steered her, secure in his command. When they reached solitude, she longed for silence to gather her thoughts again; but he was not silent, since he could not venture to be. He sat stringing sentences, anything that came: he told her stories even, as she

recollected afterwards. He seemed at once tired and excited, gathered to meet a crisis he had foreseen.

'I am afraid you are anxious,' she said, breaking the silence when he stopped. 'And if so, you must not stay. You must go back to her and not consider me.'

He looked at her a moment. 'I am anxious,' he said, 'and I want to be there. I calculated it was worth it, that was all. I couldn't miss my whole evening, Miss Falkland, so I gambled for a third.'

His 'evening' were her dances.

'You have the whole,' said Helena, her voice shaken. 'This is the whole evening. I should have asked you to let me off the other two to-night.'

'You're ill,' said John quickly. He had just noticed her pallor.

'No: only my mother thought it one too many. She told me so. So I struck out two.'

'Why?' said Johnny, intent on her look and tone.

'I'm not going—just as far as they'll let me. They needn't think it,' said Helena. She added in another tone—'And I don't want to make her unhappy, any of them, before—'

'Before you must,' said John. She had bitten her lip. In the long pause, her eyes turned slowly, as if compelled against their will, in his direction. Not till they reached his did he stir at all.

'Oh, go,' she said, horrified and entranced. 'You mustn't, really.' For he had swung forward on the instant and snatched her hand.

'But this is my whole evening,' he said. 'And yours, you admitted it. I can't let you off that admission, Helena,—it's too glorious. You practically put your pencil through all the other names on your card.' She did so, with the same hand that he was grasping, a shaking little hand, while he slipped to a kneeling posture at her side. Together they made a very crooked line, scoring

through all the alien initials: and having completed the work, looked in one another's eyes and laughed.

'Oh, this is heaven,' said Johnny, as pale as she was. 'Is it true, Helena?'

'Of course it is true. The first true thing of my life, I think.'

'And of mine,' he said instantly.

'I'm wicked by nature, I suppose,' she said, quite simply. 'I never knew I was before.'

'Wicked? You're divine! The only woman I ever knew who cannot lie. You can't, Helena, the whole gang of them can't teach you. I think you live by the truth.'

'I know I love you,' she whispered, laughing low. 'I can't think how it's happened, but I do.'

'But you oughtn't to have told me,' he laughed back. 'You ought to have let concealment—and so on.' He touched her cheek with a curved finger, very gently. 'That's what the girls do in the nice stories, always.'

She shook her head, defending the nice stories. 'They only do that when he loves another best.'

'And you knew I loved you best? No, you're divine,' he asseverated. 'But how, darling?—since when? I've acted so rippingly, Helena. I'm dashed if I didn't act well!'

'Rippingly,' she nodded. 'But not quite well enough, for me. And of course I didn't act well enough for you—because I can't act, can I? You know I can't. You are the person who knows. Oh, if only——'

It came. She caught her breath and shut her eyes, her head leaning helplessly against him. The truth had struck her, and from her, reverberated to him. For a moment it stunned—froze in both that beautiful, elemental rapture of discovery. Then each was seized with scruples—for the other, of course. She first.

'It's nonsense, of course,' she said, in a reasonable, resigned little tone. 'Silliness,—it's all a fairy-tale,—I quite see that. I've known it always when I was sensible, not asleep. After this, you will go away again.'

'I shan't.' He swore it. : 'You are mine.'

'Yes,—listen,—because you are not like other people. You are a king's son,—can't do what you want.'

'I can choose my princess,—Goldilocks.' He touched and smoothed her treasure of hair with his fine brown fingers. He had taken her completely in his arms. Terror and joy seemed exactly equal to Helena, she stood on the knife-edge between them. Each panting breath she drew was joy and pain. Was this heaven, she wondered? She had often speculated in her childhood what heaven was. Yet still she strove for daylight reason, valiantly.

'Listen, Mr. Ingestre—'

'Say John,' he commanded.

'I can't,—I really daren't. Oh, don't you see? She is there already. You have chosen.'

'I never chose! I swear it. . . . Helena, we don't. If you will put it that way, I'll use your reasoning. Lord knows it was Ursula's fault even less than mine. She was laid before me, to take or leave, at a moment when my father had me at his mercy. I always meant to tell you this, it's the thing I had hoped to tell you. . . . Listen now. I'd half-killed my mother, you know, in trying to chuck my—er—kingdom for the stage. I still think the other's a better kingdom. My father in a fury is—what he is. I was bad enough at the time, half off my head, but I'm nothing to him. Mother was too ill to help me, and that, of course, was my fault,—and his advantage. See? He used that against me at every turn, went on at it, hammered—beast!—it did for me in the end. He knows how to do for me—pretty well—I never told Mother half. I was sick of it,—tired out,—I was only twenty-two.' He took breath, exhausted even in the recital, as it seemed. 'Course I'd made love to the girl,—her people expected it,—she wanted me, made it pretty clear. And I liked her—think I did—' He paused anew, his eyes seeking, his brow raised. Then he brushed all vain apology aside. 'But anyhow, what does it matter, darling? I'd not seen you then. I couldn't

know, couldn't guess, I should ever find you. Could I? Tell me if I could.'

But she was still hopeless, drooping like a shorn flower,—terribly pale. His scruples came then, inevitably. 'My little girl,' he murmured. 'Have I hurt you? I was wrong.'

'No,' she gasped. 'I've never been so happy. It's enough—for all my life.' He watched her silently.

'I've hurt you,' he repeated, 'it's monstrous. How old are you, Helena?'

'Nineteen and three months.'

'Monstrous,—it's too young. You can't know.'

'Teach me to know,' she said. 'I'm not afraid.'

'You're goodness itself,—heaven's goodness. I oughtn't to touch you.'

He loosened the constriction of his arms, and she instantly nestled closer to him. Every movement of her childish confidence alarmed him more. If she had shown the least suspicion, shrinking,—knowledge, as he said. But she was at home in his arms, had flown there straight, nature guiding and her warm heart. She felt, as he did, that all other things in the world might be wrong—this was right. She was made for him: most glorious and most terrible, they knew it, both.

Only in him the *grande passion*, the great stress, awakened deeps unknown to her. The whole of him, and the knowledge he had painfully earned, arose to defend her. All his past experience went for nothing, if it could not illuminate this. Seeking desperately to think for Helena, to see things for her, John was for the first time humbled, knew himself unfit. How could he ever pay what he owed her for that confession? How could such as he pretend to pay? That was his first thought, and significant as his posture at her side. Her innocence and devotion, together with her high courage, completely conquered him. He knew, as he knelt there, he was 'overthrown' like Orlando: at her feet, for life.

'Unless my mother is worse,' he said with difficulty, 'I am going to the country next month. I must go down for a time,—later I join my wife abroad.'

'Abroad?' Her hand tightened on him.

'She's ordered to some baths, for her health. She's not strong.' He was still seeking desperately the things he could, and could not, say. His swift glances constantly swept her in, as though for tonic and consolation. It was the same anxious look that had puzzled her at the reception: different now, for she understood it. He needed her, needed sorely: she wondered she had not guessed.

'Must you go to the country?' she said.

'I must,—business: and it is some way.'

'I am going with my brother and Mr. Auberon to the Lakes in August,' said Helena. 'We shall be walking about.'

'Then it is less far,' said Johnny. 'Much.' He cursed Mr. Auberon in his soul. How dare he walk with Helena across the Lake country? Of all glorious girls to walk with, in a glorious land! Black thunder gathered on Johnny's brow.

'I shall come and walk too,' he observed.

'No,—because you have your business.' A pause. 'Don't look so cross,' she entreated. 'I'll write to you,—give me your address.'

'It's Routhwick, my father's Yorkshire estate.' He wrote it on the back of her dance-card, with his arms still about her, and said absently,—'You can see the hills from there.'

'Do you love mountains?' said Helena, her eyes adoring him. 'I'm so glad,—so do I.'

'I was born at Routhwick,' said Johnny. 'I love every inch of it: for which reason, no doubt,' he added, handing back her card, 'my wife does not. Now I've got to go,—my little angel.' He clutched her, and looked her all over, with hungry eyes.

'My evening's done,' he said, holding her clenched hand back against him. 'The best of my life, so far. Is yours?'

She nodded. He looked down at her hand doubtfully, and kissed her fingers once.

'Good-night,' said Helena, lifting her mouth to him like a child.

'Oh, Lord help me,' said Johnny internally. But he did not do it, even then. He bent his cheek to her fair brow a minute, holding her to him with all the force, the life that was in him; and then let her go, and dragged himself away.

Helena, after a space, straightened herself, and went back to the ballroom. Her step was languid, and her limbs tired,—to her own surprise, for it was only the third dance, and she was young enough hardly to know fatigue.

'What's the matter with Miss Falkland?' said somebody in her hearing as she passed; and added, not in her hearing,—'Good heavens, how lovely she looks!'

By luck—great luck—she passed Mrs. Shovell before she reached the fullest light. By better luck still, Helena's own brother was sitting at her side. They rose simultaneously, and Harold, striding forward, put a hand upon her.

'Come this way a minute,' he said briefly. 'Mrs. Shovell wants you. Don't go on.'

Helena, pallid and brilliant-eyed, looked beyond him. 'Someone is waiting,' she said dreamily. 'I'd rather not make a fuss.'

'My dear girl, the fuss will make itself if you go through that door, trust me. You don't know what you're looking like.'

'But—what will you say?' Helena succumbed to the pressure on her, with a faint sob of relief.

'I'll say Mrs. Shovell is seedy, and you're looking after her. That'll hold water, won't it?' He turned round.

'Brilliant,' said Violet. It was brilliant, being near the truth, for she was not well, and had come that evening simply not to disappoint her friends, the Weyburn family.

‘It’ll rile the Mater too,’ murmured Harold, ‘which is all to the good.’

He looked at the two girls a moment, and went on with a nod, satisfied that he had done well in this last move. Two moves, indeed. For, turning over his resources, after his failure with his mother, he had made straight for that girl, Helena’s friend. She had proved to be pretty well up-to-date in the Ingestre business,—Harold had expected that. He had spotted her as a girl of sense at their first encounter, long since, in Regent’s Hall. Sense was all Harold granted Violet, but it meant something, from him. He had really had quite an enjoyable half-hour at her side, conveying things to her through the medium of perfectly conventional dialogue, and being adroitly met half-way. After Harold’s mother’s recent exhibition, it was refreshing. He even ventured to broach the subject of the Lake District expedition in August : and Mrs. Shovell saw the point of it, which Harold had hardly hoped of her. She showed her sense once more in being interested.

This pleasant plan Harold had himself proposed, as a remedy for all ills, at a date as early as Easter. He had counted on his mother’s recognising instantly its supreme value for Helena : combining as it did fresh air, hard exercise, Harold’s society, Auberon’s moral support, and the absence of the cad Ingestre, all in a single flash of Harold’s genius. But his mother, failing to recognise anything of the sort, or to see anything as Harold saw it, had put it off and off ; until now, Harold much feared by the signs in his sister’s face, it had come too late.

Lately, encouraged by Helena’s sensible friend, he had gone into detail. Knowing the Westmorland district like the back of his hand, he had drawn plans for Mrs. Shovell, and recited strings of beautiful and suggestive names, together with the inns, farms, streams with bathing properties, and other places of refreshment he meant to patronise. Mrs. Shovell seemed to like listening, though

she said little,—but then she was not well. Her sense altogether had been so remarkable, and she looked so nice at Harold's side, that with a new flash of his genius, he had invited her to come too. This would complete the quartet, put a finishing touch to Helena's cure, and be extremely exciting for Harold by the way. But Mrs. Shovell, owing, he supposed, to babies and such-like, did not see it. There was a little line in her forehead, together with a little curve of her lip, that suggested the proposal amused her. Harold had just been wondering why she smiled like that, as though he were far younger than she was—which was not the case—when his sister hove in sight, and distracted him.

Now, leaving Violet in charge, he abandoned duty, content on the whole with his evening's work; and returned to the simple charms of the younger Miss Weyburn—perhaps to rest his mind. But he took one more momentous decision before the evening was quite out, having turned it over carefully. He would give a few selected facts to the old governor at home, and get him to talk to Helena a bit, during their customary walk in the Gardens on Sunday afternoon. The old governor, with girls, had good ideas at times.

As for his mother, he gave her up.

IV

Johnny arrived late in his own home, but Ursula was waiting for him. Her mother-in-law being really ill, she had quietly annulled the dance, though she was already dressed for it when the news came. Johnny, who was dressed too, had gone straight to his father's house; and she had not seen him since, though he had telephoned soon after his departure that there was no immediate reason for anxiety.

Ursula, sitting alone by the hearth in her handsome drawing-room, had not wasted her time. Her fingers were

busy : she was learning her new crochet-stitch by patient practice, and making by its means a shawl for a widow, or a petticoat for an orphan, we are not sure which. Soldiers' daughters have their eyes turned on the suffering centres of the world, the war-centres, at least : and since war is common in our civilised era, so is widowhood in its wake.

So working, Ursula reflected steadily. John's mother was hopelessly ill, and though these sharper crises came and went, they could ultimately finish in but one way. Agatha's death would add to Ursula's responsibilities immediately. There was no doubt her father-in-law would continue to appeal to her to act hostess on his premises ; or, what was more probable, considering his mother's age, shift the whole burden of entertainment to Ursula's house. It would change the quiet life of her house considerably, and it would ' stir up ' John. Having got so far, Ursula set her lips, turned her crochet, and diverted.

She thought of her dress for a period,—the sight of her beautiful satin ball-skirt reminded her. If Agatha died before the season ended, she would have to sacrifice some very handsome gowns. On the other hand, she knew she looked well in black, being fair,—that was a gentle consolation. The only time Johnny had complimented her in recent years, was when she suddenly draped herself in black for a Royal funeral. She had cut out Violet Shovell on that occasion, another pleasing reminiscence. Now she might confidently hope to cut her out for a considerable period : since, if there were any real sense of fitness in the girl at all—as Ursula trusted—she would adopt full mourning too.

Johnny would mind,—that was the next subject that occurred to her : he would feel his mother's death considerably,—she must prepare herself for that. He had been visibly frightened that evening, and would be sulky, as surely, when he returned. She could not pretend to ignore Johnny's devotion to that woman, one of the innumerable women with whom she was expected to share him. If he

lost his mother, he would not even come to her for consolation,—not he. He would go elsewhere, to Violet, to some other little inexperienced doll of a schoolgirl—unnamed. Yet, reaching that thought, her crocheting work grew feverish, irregular, endangering the immaculate outline of the widow's shawl.

She cast her eyes over herself, not her dress this time, and glanced up at the lighted mirror. There was nothing wrong with her,—she had more, not less, than the majority of the women she encountered. She was not a thrilling beauty, of course : modish artists did not press to paint her, as they had done with one or two of Johnny's lovely cousins : but she was well above the average. She dressed well, and set off her dresses,—that she knew by the tailors' attitude, if not her own eyes. She rode, skated and danced well, if not brilliantly. She kept herself heedfully up-to-date in her reading,—even poetry : she had often been in front of Johnny there. As house-mistress she was perfection, dared anybody to compete ; and all Johnny's random friends, lugged in at any hour, respected her. Why then did he not *at least* respect ?

No, it was John who was different from all other men, she decided, not she from her married sisters. It was, it must be, he who was in the wrong. She thought bitterly of her old suitors,—she had more than one. With any of them—she thought of each in turn—she would have been happier. So would they, not a doubt of it. They had all paired off, quite rightly, she did not blame them : but any of them, she guessed, would have been a little better off with her. She knew what she had to give, and its market value in the world, exactly : she did not exaggerate. Only, in presenting this series of benefits to John, she had not happened to add children to the list.

The girl stopped working : her hands dropped wearily. She had done all she knew in that matter as well, she had not failed her duty, nor the ideals of her upbringing. She had not complained, barely alluded to her disappointment,

—certainly never to John. She had been patient, cheerful, prudent, attentive to her health, she had armed herself with reasoning, she had prayed. Her religion, though temperate like herself, was earnest and genuine. Her priests assured her there is an answer to prayer,—she had not found it. She had prayed,—yes, besought, humbled herself, striven in soul till she was tired. She had striven against jealousy, too, in this one thing: though of course, poor girl, she had not succeeded. She refused to believe her bitter feeling to Violet dated from the birth of her child: she had ante-dated it to the point where, in John's father's house, she had first tempted him to admire her. So with other married women,—of the rest she did not think. Ursula, cognizant of her generation, had heard or read in current reviews that the great unmarried ranks of women suffer from this same privation, bitterly. But what was their suffering, compared with hers? Wedded, and stripped of her right. Enthroned by a haughty family, that the world might see her indignity more clearly. A whole ring of eyes fixed on her anxiously from year to year, and each year sliding past her empty, futile. Middle-age, in all its horror, threatening just ahead. Doctors' sugary consolations, empty auguries, practised no doubt on hundreds of women as miserable as herself. Could they not see that to her, *more* than to all the hundreds, a child was owing, essential to her position, a crying need? Fools that they were not to divine it must be so, however well she feigned the contrary! Fool that her husband was, calling himself so clever, most of all!

To-night, when John came home, he looked exhausted, and seemed taciturn. He told her his mother was better and sleeping, but that was all he said on the subject. Then he remained long, his hands locked across his eyes, saying nothing at all. Ursula asked him at last if his head was aching, and he denied it; but the question seemed to rouse him to her existence, and he turned his attention to

her passingly. The sight of her still in her ball-dress seemed to annoy him, and he asked her why she had not changed.

'Why haven't you?' said Ursula tranquilly. 'I suppose mine is the same reason,—laziness.'

'You're not lazy,' argued Johnny: obviously at his crossest, but Ursula forgave him.

'I assure you I have been lazy this last hour,' she said, glancing instinctively at the fine growth of the crochet shawl. 'Will you have some whisky, John?'

'No,' he said. 'Water alone,—I'm beastly thirsty.'

She handed it, and he did not thank her. He drank eagerly, though, she noted, and the rare flush was perceptible in his dark face. Ursula, who never quite lost the hope of his falling ill and really needing her, began to be interested. John was not immune from earthly microbes, after all, though he might like to be thought so.

'What are you doing?' he snapped suddenly, snatching his hand away: for, laying down her work, she had extended hers to touch his wrist.

'I wanted to see if you were feverish,' said Ursula. 'However, it's just as you like.' She took up her work again. 'I suppose if you were you wouldn't tell me. You'd go and see a doctor on the sly, and fly at everyone who asked you how you were.'

'How well you know me,' said Johnny. 'I've never been better, as it happens.' He gazed at the lamp, lying full length in his chair, and added dreamily—'In my life.'

'It might be the influenza,' said Ursula after a pause. 'There's heaps about.'

'It isn't the influenza,' said Johnny.

As luck would have it, he sneezed at this moment, and Ursula glanced at him. She doubtless considered it proved her point. However, he really could not be bothered about what Ursula did or did not consider. She was beside the mark.

He felt in his pocket for his handkerchief without looking,

and—as luck would have it again—pulled out with it the half of a long white glove.

‘What on earth——?’ said Ursula.

Following her eyes, Johnny looked down, laid hands on the glove without haste or emotion, drew it completely out, folded it, and tucked it into his pocket again. . . . Now he was in for it,—so much the better!

There was silence in the room, a meaning silence. Ursula herself had put out his clothes that evening, and assured herself that the pockets were empty. The glove, therefore, was a recent acquisition. The sight of it frightened her sensibly. Not that he had never taken girls’ gloves before,—it was quite on the cards he had a collection, labelled, in some corner of his fastness in the studio, to show his friends,—it was the occasion that frightened Ursula. Indeed, granted the occasion, and with the evidence she held, a stronger mind must have given in, admitted then and there her defeat. Not Ursula. She knew it meant something, but she shut her mind to what its meaning must be. She sat immovable, impenetrable, trying to control her troubled breathing; to prevent, by will force, the flush she felt mounting to her face.

‘I left when the clock struck twelve,’ said Johnny to fill the gap, ‘and picked this up on the doorstep. Cinderella for kids, adapted. It was a pretty ball.’

‘You mean—you went?’

‘For an hour, yes.’

The girl gasped. ‘An hour? To-night?’

‘I went to-night.’

‘A lot you care for your mother,’ said Ursula, on a hurried breath, quite coolly.

‘That won’t hold water, my dear,’ thought Johnny. ‘Get on.’

‘Is that glove Violet’s?’ said Ursula presently. She had achieved disdain.

‘A size too large, I should say,’ said Johnny. ‘Get on.’

'Likely I should guess,' said Ursula, 'for your amusement. Whosoever it is, you ought to return it. It's dishonest, to say no worse.'

'And you're dishonest, to say nothing stronger,' returned Johnny. He added with impatience—'Oh, shut it, Ursula: it's no use.'

His eyes were covered again. She stirred his own obstinacy. He would not argue on such false lines. She bored him, simply.

Presently, having recovered herself, Ursula began to lecture.

'When I've been doing all I can for you,' she said, 'refused the Weyburns myself,—to go and flirt——'

'I didn't flirt,' said Johnny. 'I swear it.'

'You might think of yourself,' said Ursula, disregarding, 'if not of me. As if fifty people wouldn't notice you were there, when I refused? As if they won't all be talking of it to-morrow, and why, and how——'

'Oh, I say, will they?' murmured Johnny.

'That's what you like,'—she rode over him. 'Really I think it's what you live for,—showing off.'

'Thanks,' he said, 'I don't really. I can't do more than deny it. And I rather doubt if eyes are fixed on my doings to that extent. I hope not——'

'Rather late to hope it,' said Ursula.

She saw the chance shot had got home. He had flinched for the moment, thinking of Helena: but not for long. Past was past, for Johnny. Besides, he was growing interested. The way Ursula kept it up, in the face of all the facts, of the truth, which she knew, was extraordinary. The scene, the position was unhackneyed, to say the least. It touched the sublime absurdities.

'Let's get the point of view,' he said agreeably. 'Perhaps you thought I was showing off, lately,'—he touched his pocket,—'displaying my winnings,—did you? Well, you can take my word for it, I'd sooner you hadn't seen.'

'For her sake,' returned Ursula icily, making him start.

'But I shouldn't trouble about that, you know. She'd rather I saw,—if not her own husband——'

'Husband?' Johnny gaped for an instant, genuinely, ingenuously amazed. Then, seeing the tack, he dropped comedy. He gathered himself too, his mouth shutting into its most dangerous line.

'Now look here,' he said quietly, 'I must ask you to be so kind as to leave my cousin Violet out of it. I'm beastly sorry, and so would she be, poor little girl, since she likes to be useful. But you can't use her, in this instance. It simply can't be done.'

'Use her?' Ursula paled a little before the charge. 'What do you mean?'

'What should I mean? There are limits, even for me. See? Get on to somebody else, do you mind? There are lots to choose from, married as well.'

'But what do you mean, about Violet? I want to know.'

'Sure?' he jeered bitterly. 'You don't care for truth, as a rule,—and I can tell it, I warn you. Better let it alone.' As she still stared, after some silence,—'Am I to tell you?' he said.

'Yes.' She dared herself and him.

Johnny tossed up. 'All right,' he said. 'On my word, you deserve it, dodging behind her like that. . . . I'm jolly fond of Violet, you mayn't know, and you've never been fair to her,—for myself I won't speak. You were jealous when she was fourteen—oh yes, you were. She's done a lot for me, at different times, and stood a lot from me too. It's been no fun for her, knowing me, always. I was ready to treat her to a dose of my difficulties last night, but I found, for once, it couldn't be managed. She really couldn't be bothered with me.'

'Oh, last night, was it?' said Ursula. 'Did she snub you?'

'Longing to hear about it, aren't you?' said Johnny, turning his laziest drooping look upon her, passingly.

'Not often I get snubbed, is it? But she's one of the people who can do it, I admit that,—she can do it in style.' He waited again, tantalising deliberately. 'She looked ill last night at the concert,' he said slowly. 'Granny noticed it. I took her home.'

'Ill?' said Ursula. She had turned and started: then she shrank, visibly.

'Just so,' he said. 'I hadn't meant to speak of it,—granted Granny, it was safe to get round. Granny was at her best, at the concert. "That girl will faint," she said to me, as pleased as possible, half-way through. It was her unusually—er—jovial expression that showed me. Ghastly they are, the old women,—gloating,—I've seen it before now. 'Course Granny had nine of her own,—some time since,—' he paused, the sneer fading on his expressive face, —' she might have forgotten a bit, put it at that. Anyhow, I went along to the kid, and asked her not to faint, for my sake, because Granny was expecting her to,—and she didn't,—scored. I never tried to stop a girl fainting before,' said Johnny, pensively, 'but I was pretty sure that was the way to do it, granted there was a way,—and I was right. Now I shall know next time. It's true, all girls aren't so beastly considerate for a fellow's feelings as she is,—or so sensible,—or so brave. She was better in the interval, talking again. Only she looked awfully seedy, poor little thing, and her hand—which I happened to be holding—was jolly cold. So I saved her from Granny's humane attentions—not to say attendance—that would have finished her—and took her home myself.'

He glanced again under his eyelids at Ursula, who sat like a rock, icy, disdainful, her hands folded above her folded work.

'I returned her to her man,' he went on rather lower, 'and got no thanks for it. He couldn't afford to attend to me either,—odd, isn't it?—didn't seem to think I mattered much. She likes that fellow, you mayn't have noticed,—what I mean is, you might have left it out of account. As

for him—I might have been a fly on the wall ! He treated me to a demonstration gratis—knowing I knew the girl was twice too good for him, it was just his chance. I don't blame him, either. You'd have called it damned improper probably. I couldn't have done it better myself.'

Once more he waited to take breath,—he needed it.

'I'm out of it altogether in that little establishment,' he finished, 'for the next eight months or so. And deserve to be, no doubt,—you needn't tell me so. Only—if you and the council of the upright want a name to poke at me—to shelter behind—you can leave hers alone for the same period—that's all.'

'I may mention I never used her name,' said Ursula, breathless as he.

'No, you took care not to,' said Johnny. 'You never use names, do you ? . . . All right, you can go.'

And she went, of course. It was not in her, or any woman, to stand more. He had used the whole of his resources, every art he possessed, in that speech for the defence of the girl she detested : in the lazy, easy opening, becoming ever swifter and fiercer as he closed in on her and reached the end. The process resembled not torture so much—Johnny could not torture when his blood was up, however he might wish to do so—as a surgical operation. He fully intended to hurt her ; yet that he was cutting himself, from first to last, even more deliberately than her, was what she could not realise, knowing so little of his private longings, or of his peculiar pride. She had never cared to recognise the fact that John's desire for children, for any child, for youth about him, was as eager and simple as hers was selfish and vain : naturally—since it was one of the admissions that must shake her self-righteous attitude towards him.

She was almost aghast, in consequence. The contrast he depicted, in that light edged tone, was too complete, too cruel, with their own conditions. Heartless, so to turn her own weapon against her, so to carve the scene he had

witnessed on her brain, that all night long, as he must have known, her jealousy would rage at it fruitlessly. And that when she was stricken already by his faithlessness, by his all too probable desertion. He deserved nothing of her, nothing. All means of resistance, of retaliation, would be justified, when he could treat her, his own wife, on his own hearth, like that.

She swept out, still and stately, pausing to put her work quietly away before she went. As a display of her own fixed attitude it was perfect; and he looked on at it, hopelessly.

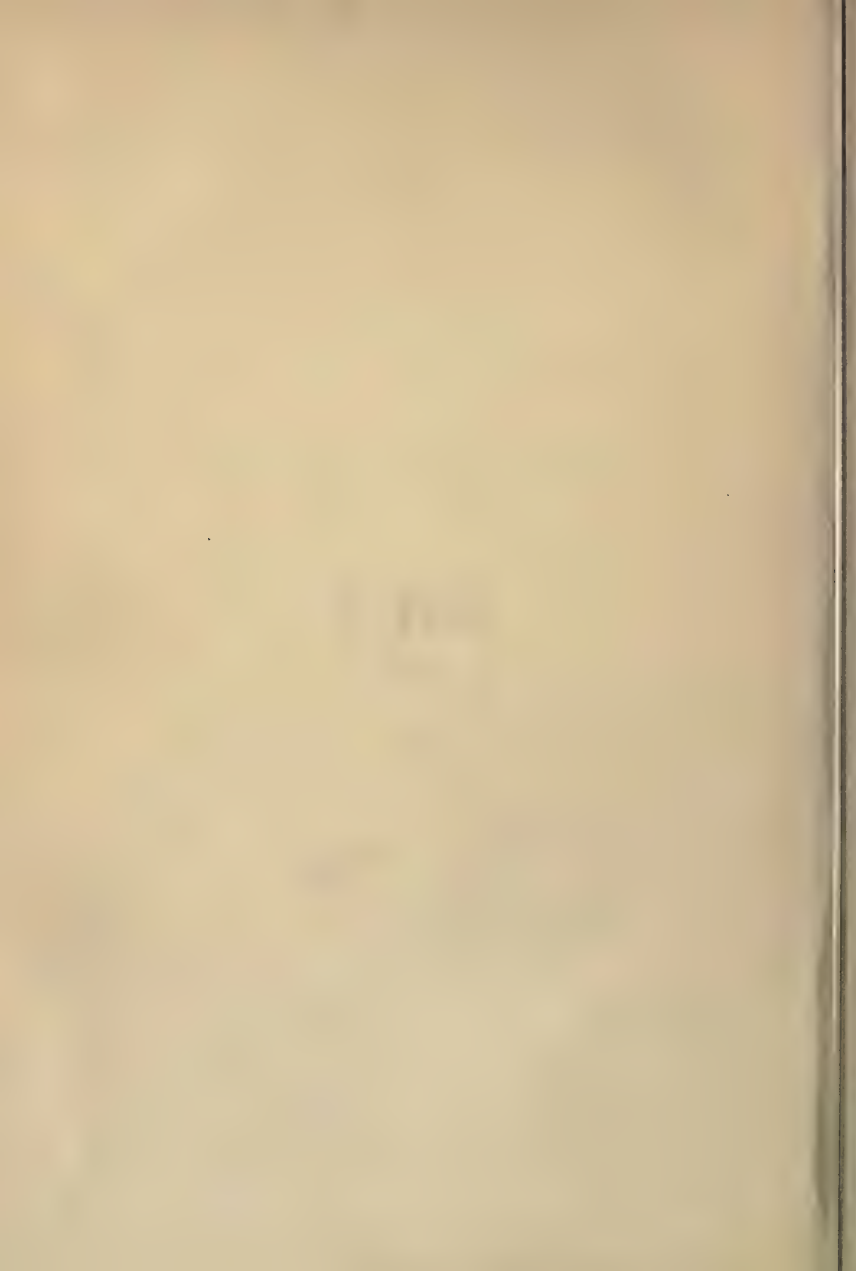
'Oh Lord,' he soliloquised, subsiding after his dramatic effort. 'She makes me,—I can't help it, Mother. Must get through to the real thing, somehow. I expect I'm a beast.'

Having uttered this excuse aloud, to one of the visions that haunted him, he lay silent for a period, collapsed sidelong in his chair, his restless eyes seeking any way of escape—but one—from his entanglement.

'Coward,—she's such a *coward*,' he asserted, still half aloud, as though controverting somebody. 'And such a bat! Blind bat,—with claws,—sticks to you, bah! . . . I hate bats, darling,—I loathe bat-women,—don't you?'

It was an appeal, addressed to Helena's white glove, which he had slipped out for his consolation, and was holding against his cheek. After this outbreak, he sat for hours into the morning, fondling the supple fabric of the glove, and considering.

PART IV



THE SELF-DECEIVER

I

It was conveyed to the head of the Ingestres by means of a well-written note that, owing to her mother-in-law's precarious condition, Ursula had postponed her cure at Sophienbad till later in the autumn. She thought of accompanying John to Routhwick instead, so as to be within easy reach of telegrams. She hoped this plan would meet with John's father's approval. She trusted dear Mother had passed—and so forth.

To judge by the grunt with which John's father received the message, it did not meet with his approval as entirely as Ursula hoped.

'What do you say to that?' he asked, handing the sheet to his mother across the breakfast-table. 'Personally I say, thank you for nothing, young woman.'

'You will have to be more civil than that when you reply to it,' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'It is extremely well expressed.'

'But bad policy, hey?' said her son. 'Mistaken in the case, I mean. I think she's wrong.'

'I think she's right,' said Mrs. Ingestre instantly. 'Routhwick's healthy, and smart doctors are notorious idiots. Ursula never looks so well as when she has been down there.'

'I'm not talking of health,' said Mr. Ingestre. 'Routhwick's healthy enough. Johnny'll get sick of the sight of her, that's what I mean, if she sticks to him like this. A bad move, I call it. Better to give him a rest.'

'In my day,' said Mrs. Ingestre, 'people did not ask for rests from their wedded wives,—they put up with 'em.'

As Johnny has brewed he must bake, and she's a thoroughly nice girl.'

'Thoroughly,' said her son grimly. He glanced at the letter. 'Why can't she say what she's up to, though? She must know I should see through that. She doesn't care a button for Agatha, never did. What's the good of putting it on, then? It's just a shade slippery.'

'You might allow something for common civility,' said Mrs. Ingestre.

'I do,' said her son. 'I always allow for polite lying. But that's not polite,—it's offensive to common sense.'

He got up, and took the note away with him. He answered it with perfect courtesy, but more coldly than his wont. He liked smartness, and admired ingenuity, but cunning was a thing he detested, and he had marked again the shade of slyness he had noted before. He was sensitive also, for the moment, to slights to Agatha: and the rather cloying tone of condolence in the note did not ring true. Lastly, though he had little feeling for his son at common times, he could not doubt his real grief at present. He suspected that Johnny's instinct, like his own, was towards solitude in sorrow; so that, even from that point of view, it was bad taste in Ursula to dog him.

'She's playing for her own hand,' thought the man of experience. 'That's how she'll go through life probably,—poor Johnny!'

He opened by the same post a note from Helena Falkland, enclosing a photograph of herself as Rosalind he had asked for, and she had promised. The note was only a couple of lines, girlish and modest in style, with a little joke in passing in reference to a conversation they had had. But Mr. Ingestre dwelt longer than was necessary over it and its accompanying picture, the grace and strength of the young frame, the sweet firm lines of the face. 'Perhaps we were wrong,' was the silent result of his meditations: but he did not say it aloud. He shut the little letter safely away, and enthroned the portrait on his

writing-table. Meanwhile, the dowager Mrs. Ingestre made her way to Ursula.

There was, between her and Ursula, a certain sympathy, owing largely to the fact that both had need of criticising Agatha. Ursula, as we have said, had a well-preserved grudge against her husband's mother. Mrs. Ingestre had merely the common maternal grudge against any female who presumed to marry her son. It was inconceivable that she should have approved any daughter-in-law completely : and perhaps Agatha, on the whole, had stood wear as well as any victim the old lady could have selected. The fact that such a critic found so few weaknesses, in the end, to deal with, spoke more than volumes of flattery in Agatha's favour. The word 'blue-stocking' really summed them all : and that fine old term, in our day, has perforce lost some of its bitterness. But Mrs. Ingestre consoled herself by never granting Agatha's virtues except grudgingly. A blue-stocking, as such, is necessarily incapable of fulfilling an ordinary woman's duties in life : much less the duty required towards the head of the Ingestre family. Mrs. Ingestre, in consequence, discounted Agatha's best efforts always.

As, for instance, when her grandchild's birth was announced to her, she said, 'Oh, she's managed it, has she ? A girl, I suppose.'

When she was informed it was, on the contrary, a fine son, she said instantly, 'She'll spoil it. Keep the whip-hand for your life, John, or the child will be ruined by her fads.'

When Mr. Ingestre's 'whip-hand' failed signally to keep the young man in the ways of his fathers at eighteen years old, Mrs. Ingestre pointed to Agatha again as the secret promoter of discord. Johnny's tame submission, on the other hand, perplexed and troubled her mightily, until she found a comfortable explanation for it in a sentimentality derived from his mother's family, which would certainly weaken and dilute the Ingestre stock.

Since Agatha had deprecated the Thynne connection, Mrs. Ingestre had been strong in promoting it, and found endless virtues for Ursula during engagement and the early period of marriage. Since then her favour had wearied slightly ; but it sprang up in force whenever she perceived injustice being done to the girl. Her son's remarks at the breakfast-table had awakened this contrary spirit : and she paid Ursula the honour of a visit that same afternoon.

'How kind of you, Grandmamma,' said Ursula, taking great pains with her enunciation. 'This is Mr. Auberon.'

'I have had the honour,' murmured Mr. Auberon, standing very straight and looking conscious.

'Have you?' said Mrs. Ingestre, shooting her sharp glance at him. 'When?'

'I was with Miss Falkland that day in the Park when you—' 'spiked us,' Quentin was inclined to say.

'So you were,' Mrs. Ingestre nodded, recollecting, for her memory was remarkable. 'My grandson told me then that Ursula knew your family.' She took a general view of the youth, and found him 'presentable,' as she had done before. 'I knew an Auberon once,' she remarked. 'Hugh,—a rogue he was.'

'That's my father,' said Quentin.

'Indeed it wasn't,' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'Your grandfather, perhaps.'

'My grandfather's name was Quentin.'

'Quentin? Yes, there was a Quentin too,—they were brothers. Couldn't forget a name like that,' she added.

'It's Mr. Auberon's name as well,' said Ursula, secure that her visitor was pleasing. 'Do you like it, Grandmamma?'

'Romantical a trifle,' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'Hugh's better: I like short names. Short names for men, and long for women. My mother was called Eleonora,—there's no more beautiful name than that.'

'Helena is more beautiful,' said Quentin boldly.

'It's the name of a great beauty,' said Mrs. Ingestre drily. 'I don't allude to Miss Falkland,—there was another, once before. She made a lot of mischief, the other one did.'

'I hope you don't imply——' laughed Quentin.

'I don't imply anything against a pretty girl, above all in a young man's presence.' Mrs. Ingestre, greatly pleased with her wit, turned to Ursula. 'Take my cloak, my dear: your room's too hot.'

For the next twenty minutes, the dowager talked exclusively to Mr. Auberon, and left out Ursula altogether. This means, of course, that she fell in love. It is easy for a very old lady to fall in love with a very young man, well-made and well-mannered, who takes the trouble to be agreeable. Nor was Mrs. Ingestre averse to sense and a well-made brain in man,—the Ingestres were not fools; nor to the fact that a great-uncle who was a rogue, at some indefinite period of the past, had introduced him. It speaks well for the standing of a family to have rogues two generations back: and the whole appearance of this boy spoke well for the family's future. Mrs. Ingestre was pleased: and since he was kind and clear, she was puzzled by nothing,—a great advantage in talking to his age,—except one point, that she instantly brought up, when he had taken his departure. She swept aside Ursula's attempt to win commendation for her protégé, in order to make this point.

'Did you understand, my dear,' she said, 'that he, and that girl, and a brother of hers, were to make a tour?'

'Yes, Grandmamma. In the Lakes, so he said.'

'Was her father to be of the party?'

'No, just the young people, I think. Walking, you know.'

'I know very well. And striding over rocks, and sleeping at inns, I presume,—and bathing in company, one might almost gather. He must be engaged to her,' said Mrs. Ingestre.

'Not quite, I think,' said Ursula.

'Well, he will be, before the tour is out. Not that it makes it any better,' said Mrs. Ingestre bitterly. 'The mother must be out of her mind.'

'People do it,' said Ursula.

'Maybe. They don't, with a girl like that. Have you seen the girl?'

'Often,' said Ursula. 'We know her. She acted here.'

'Acts, does she? I hadn't heard that. Acts well?'

'Charmingly, I thought——'

'What did John think?' said Mrs. Ingestre, cutting across her; and after five minutes' strict examination, in the course of which Ursula was badly harried, concluded—'Rubbishy, in short: why not have said so?' Then, more pleased with herself than ever, she proceeded, 'Johnny's been gallivanting with her, so they say.'

'Oh, the usual thing,' said Ursula.

'What do you mean by that?' said the dowager, fixing her.

'Johnny won't be left out, you know what he is. So many people admire Miss Falkland. Of course he had to see a lot of her over the acting, and she dances rather well. That alone is enough for Johnny.'

There was a pause while the old lady took in the general bearing of this. 'You think there's no danger, then?' she said.

'Oh, well,' said Ursula coolly, 'I dare say her mother is wise to engage her to a nice man as soon as possible. Girls of that age are silly. Will you have some more tea, Grandmamma?' While she manipulated the tea-service, she added, with the same imperturbability—'And of course John encourages her,—he's so vain.'

'Encourages?' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'The world's getting upset with a vengeance. It was the men presumed, and the girls encouraged, in my time.' She looked closely at Ursula with her keen little old eyes. 'So you think Johnny lets himself be wooed, do you?' she said sardonically.

'Oh, don't put it like that!' Ursula took it smiling. 'You know what he is, that's all. Give John an inch, and he'll take an ell.' Before Mrs. Ingestre could intervene, she proceeded. 'He's got a glove of hers, I know that. I told him he ought to give it back again. I think flirting should stop short of stealing gloves, don't you, Grandmamma? They're so expensive.'

'You told him he ought to give it back, did you?' said the old lady, once more taking a keen survey of John's wife as she brought the tea. She felt the insincerity of her attitude vaguely, in this affair that had so disturbed John's family: together with its injustice implied to the girl she had seen in the Park that day. But she was puzzled simultaneously by the steadiness of Ursula's serenity: and being puzzled, gave herself a rest.

'Men used to pay wagers with gloves,' she said, diverting to reminiscence. 'My niece Eveleen used to get dozens,—kept herself in gloves that way. She always won her wagers,—' the old lady chuckled a little at recollections of that favourite niece—'or else they were afraid to tell her she had lost them. That's likely enough.'

'That's Violet Shovell's mother, isn't it?' said Ursula. 'Well, nowadays John snatches Violet's gloves to make things even.' She paused. 'All the same, Grandmamma, I never can help thinking there's something on the other side when men do things like that. Johnny wouldn't, I mean, with everybody.'

'Encouragement,' said Mrs. Ingestre curtly. 'That's what you mean. You dislike Violet,—needn't tell me that.'

This sudden keenness disconcerted Ursula. But it was only momentary, a little stamp, instinctive on the old tyrant's part, on Ursula's pretension in advancing a judgment in her presence. She sipped her tea and finished at leisure.

'But she's a nice little pretty girl for all that, and a good wife, as present-day women go. I am going there to enquire, when I leave you.'

After that, Mrs. Ingestre returned to Quentin Auberon, and the question of Helena's engagement, contentedly. That, being as she thought her own idea, was the thing that had really taken hold of her. It was relief unspeakable to Ursula to have thus forestalled the old lady's knife-like prying—for of course she had come to pry—by this happy chance. To start a rumour before the season closed that the conspicuous girl was engaged—even though it should be a rumour merely—must be balm to Ursula's sore pride, and assist her determined attitude. Considering Mrs. Ingestre's gift for gossip, she saw every opportunity of doing so.

Chances were all for her. Mrs. Ingestre had seen Helena first in Quentin's company,—his first mention of her in Ursula's house had been to admire her name. They were known to be constantly together, even to live beneath the same roof. The young man had a bearing of ease and confidence that was reassuring, and was a *parti* any family would approve. The Lakeland tour was the finishing touch, conclusive to Mrs. Ingestre's ideas: Ursula really blessed Helena's brother for having thought of it.

Best of all, for Ursula's credit, Mrs. Ingestre, though acute, was old. The very old, however well-dowered originally, cannot entertain more than one idea fully at a time. Before the picture of Quentin, now impressed on her mind, the picture of Johnny—the dangler after beauty, snatching a young girl's glove for a joke, and being 'told' to return it—could not seriously stand. Mrs. Ingestre dropped it in catching at the new interest. She also carried away a strong impression that Ursula's terms with her husband must be better than the family had imagined.

Nor had she a chance of revising any of these impressions, for, as she expected, her great-niece Mrs. Shovell refused her. So Mrs. Ingestre 'enquired': that is, pried on her doorstep for a period, and plagued her domestics. She extracted, with great labour, the fact that Violet had gone out to Lady Weyburn's the night before, and come home

late, and tired. So she bade the indignant parlour-maid tell her mistress she was a little fool, always trying to do twice as much as was suitable or prudent ; and drove home, contented with her day's work. She stopped half-way at a florist's, whence she despatched flowers, with her love, to Mrs. Shovell. For Eveleen Ingestre's daughter, when all was said and done, was necessarily more interesting than General Thynne's : and she was a direct descendant of the elder line as well.

II

Harold Falkland, who seldom disturbed Quentin with family problems, gave him a pretty broad hint, on the day following Lady Weyburn's ball, as to the state of things with Helena. Quentin had already taken warning on his own account from the girl's appearance, which changed in the course of a week,—a very hot week certainly,—from the rather hectic vivacity of strong excitement to an extraordinary slackness and dejection. He did not like either state, they were so different from the equable cordiality of the girl he knew : so he was not much surprised at Harold's confidence concerning a misplaced attachment, with a 'cad' lurking somewhere in the background, unnamed.

He was sorry, and said so briefly : but what he said did not seem to satisfy Harold. Harold seemed longing, during the period of their private interview, to get on to something else ; but for all his celebrated ingenuity, he did not succeed in conveying it. The most noted diplomat might indeed find it hard to convey to another party that he would like him for a brother-in-law, as soon as conveniently possible : and that was what Harold longed to do. It never seemed to enter Auberon's head that he could have solved the situation, in his own person, easily.

The fact was, Quentin had his vexations at the time,

and though he was sympathetic about the Falklands' problems, he was really more concerned about his own.

His aunt's return from the south relieved him of immediate responsibility concerning the girl Jill, and he was only glad to be quit of it. But of the abiding problem of her situation as regarded Jacoby the rat, he was not relieved, because he did not choose to be. He left his aunt her side of the work, which was the girl, but almost immediately he took up his, for he did not consider Miss Havant qualified to deal with it, or at least as properly qualified as he was. That he disliked such business profoundly was no bar to his determination, rather the reverse. Miss Havant was only thankful on her side to deliver the burden of Jacoby into his hands. Like most capable detached females, she had had to forgo man's assistance in life too often, not to value the luxury when it was offered her: and young as Quentin was, she trusted him.

Quentin saw Jacoby twice in person, having twice sought him in vain. In the first of these interviews he impressed on him the necessity of leaving his daughter in peace to make her way, so far as it might still be possible. He used to the full on the occasion his own prestige, and the naturally authoritative Auberon manner, and then hated himself for it when he saw the little rat of a man cower from him, offer him flattery and obsequious promises, no word of which Quentin found himself able to believe. The natural impulse that possessed him was to stamp this obvious failure out of existence, to end him as one ends a cockroach, there and then. Yet he was once more glad, on returning to the healthy Falkland community, that he had reached to the knot of the complication, the root of the evil, in person: seen him, addressed him, and gathered up the facts. Though, as need hardly be stated, the facts concerning Jacoby were grit and ashes in an Auberon mouth.

Jacoby was still living on the woman, Quentin discovered, with whom he had fled from Geneva. He had

quarrelled with her once, but managed to conciliate her subsequently. He had not ventured after all to show his face at Geneva, and such 'pickings' as he could claim from his wife's small inheritance, and the transfer of the house, were sent to him by Miss Havant, who settled up her former friend's affairs. On the money derived from these two sources, and on a loan he had wrung from Quentin, he was living for the minute in tolerable ease,—far greater ease than he deserved. All the above facts, with the exception of the last,—his own advance to the man,—Quentin shared with his aunt ; and such was his address and high-handedness in carrying through this unaccustomed business, that it was years before she discovered how, drained by the ingenious little rat, he crippled his own resources at the time. Nobody learnt of it, since he preferred to bear the burden of his experiments alone.

Nothing he could do, however, in the way of counsel or persuasion, would induce Jacoby himself to take up work. All his attempts failed there. Jacoby did not want to work, Quentin could only suppose that he had never found it necessary. The man's physical condition revolted him, and he did his best to spur him to undertake something active, if only to improve his health. He consulted various people, including Ursula Ingestre, about trades for Jacoby,—he even attacked Harold Falkland's brother-in-law, the sleek and egregious Thomas. Thomas, abominably patronising in tone, suggested agriculture and emigration. Quentin's opinion was that our colonies were sufficiently plagued with ne'er-do-weel rats already. Thomas then yawned and said the only thing he could think of for Jacoby was that he should marry a rich widow. Which was so near to Jacoby's own ideal of a successful existence, that it classed Thomas at once, in Harold's judgment, as one of the rat fraternity.

That which vexed Quentin's soul above all was that the insufferable Jacoby had got hold,—he could not

think how,— of Jill's success at the Ingestres' party, and the interest there expressed in her by the professional lady, Mrs. Mitchell. Quentin really had thought he was the only person to know of that,—he had not mentioned it even to Jill, lest he should have to disappoint her. The rat's methods were beyond investigation ; yet, like others of his kind, he had always haunted the theatrical world a good deal, and he might have chanced upon some of John Ingestre's half-and-half acquaintance. It proved a fatal chance, for Jill. Mrs. Mitchell had written twice very kindly to Quentin, assuring him that she had the girl in mind, and would see what could be done for her when the season reopened. Alas, it was borne in upon Mr. Jacoby that he had had this promising situation to deal with, once before in history. He had worked his daughter's first training at the expense of various kind persons who had heard her recite in Switzerland at the English hotels. Now, setting out to make the most of Mrs. Mitchell in turn, he waylaid Mrs. Mitchell's hot-tempered husband at his theatre, with quite disastrous results. Mrs. Mitchell sent a note of warning to Quentin ; and Quentin, who really had had high hopes from the connection, let his own temper go in an interview with Jacoby. The man seemed to have the fatal trick of ruining, soiling everything he touched. Mr. Auberon, struggling against a strong inclination to kick Jacoby into the nearest pond, and so free the girl of her incumbrance for ever, renewed his vigorous warning against tampering with her in her new-found home, and went back to his own, rather disheartened.

It was about this time he received a somewhat extraordinary note from old Miss Darcy, requesting him to pay her a visit. Not that there was anything unusual in the fact, for the old bearded lady liked him, and he called there now and again, when he could find the time. Whenever he did so, he had a glimpse of Jill, sometimes a few words with her, but little more ; for Miss Darcy did not encourage her ' general servant ' to intrude when she had

visitors. Miss Darcy was kind but, owing to her blue blood, strict in her ideas. The work of the world ran smoother, she considered, if people kept their places, and, fond as she was of Jill, she had never gathered that her antecedents were so lofty, that she need scruple to treat her as one treats a superior maid. Needless to say, Jill thought otherwise ; but she contained herself in her manner, and served Miss Darcy with proud exactitude and well-acted humility, hugging her superiority all the while.

Once only, when he came, Quentin found her in the front room reading to Miss Darcy, and remained there for the better part of an hour, immovable, to attend. Jill, who had been disgusted to find him so little impressed with her beautiful acting of his somewhat over-rated dramatist Shakespeare, had a second and better chance ; for it happened she was reading a comedy of Molière, and she read it exquisitely. She made both her hearers laugh constantly, without a smile herself, only throwing a glance at the visitor from time to time, to make certain that she was rising in his estimation. It was,—as later the evidence of her own journal proved,—without exception the happiest half-hour of her life.

To return to the present, what was extraordinary in Miss Darcy's note was its agitated style and circumlocution, strongly suggesting an attack of nerves in the writer. Miss Darcy was most subject to these, as he knew, for Jill complained of them. He made allowances himself, for he was very sorry for the poor old lady, restricted to a small society of her intellectual and social inferiors, who misjudged and laughed at her ; delighted always to talk with intelligent people, but rarely getting the chance. So, imagining some such origin for the request, since he happened to be free that Sunday morning, Quentin went.

He went at an appointed hour, and Jill was at church. Her mother, through good times and bad, had brought her up a Churchwoman, and Miss Darcy's own tenets being exceedingly strict and ' high,' the girl's former habits of

devotion were now fostered. Always inclined to tremble when Jill was beyond her wing, Miss Darcy was sure of her being safe in church, which was an additional advantage.

Quentin could make nothing of Miss Darcy for at least half the interview, though he soothed and talked to her as calmly as he could. She was in a fever of anxiety over something, such that even his healthy nerves found it hard to bear. He could not conceive what the matter was, for she talked persistently of everything else in the world, for long. Then, quite suddenly and apropos of nothing, she alluded to Mrs. Ingestre.

'You know her, eh?' she said.

Quentin assented, and Miss Darcy's harassed face cleared.

'Well then, you know what she is,—wise, generous, broad-minded, honourable,—one of the elect.'

Quentin was rather amazed to hear Ursula qualified by these and other terms: for Miss Darcy, clutching his knee with a gnarled hand, quite lost herself in high-sounding encomiums.

'She is generous, I know,' he said gently.

'Generous? She does good by her existence! And she has lived,' said Miss Darcy, grasping his knee, 'a most unhappy life. I know,—mind, I alone,—how much, for I lived with her, the happiest time of my life, though I fear not the happiest of hers. Her husband——' She ceased, and shook her head.

'I have heard something of the sort,' said Quentin.

'Young man,' said Miss Darcy, with wonderful feeling, 'your life is all to come. Beware, you and others, what kind of woman you choose to play with; because you will regret it, as he most surely does by now, too late.'

'Too late?' Quentin was startled. 'Mrs. Ingestre is not ill, is she?'

'She is dying,' barked Miss Darcy. Then, at his look of horror, she tracked the error with intelligent promptitude.

'Ah, ah,—you thought of Ursula. I always forget Ursula can be called by that name too. Yes, yes: and I

know they talk of the boy playing,—but not I. Johnny has something of his mother's spirit, and he has always been kind to me.'

Quentin made his apology. 'I have not met Ingestre's mother,' he said. 'I have heard my Mrs. Ingestre talk of her, that's all.'

'Ah!—that is not the same.' Miss Darcy waited a minute and seemed to listen. 'Well,' she resumed with a sigh, 'you must believe me, then, not knowing Agatha. It is only, if you knew her, you might understand. I would cut off my right hand for Agatha—still, I would do it still. Instead of that—' She waited and listened anew. 'Is that the child coming? Tell me if you hear the child. . . . Listen. Agatha gave me many beautiful things, memories mostly, memories of her. And, listen,—one thing to guard for her,—it is not mine. I held—I hold it in trust for her and Johnny. You know the thing I speak of?—I have mentioned it,—yes.'

Quentin did not know, the least; but he waited, not to worry her, sure that it would come out.

'A painted woman, that boy said to tease me. A little Maréchale somebody,—he knew the history,—I didn't care to know. Hold your tongue—I said—dragging dead scandals out of the dust-heaps: hold your impudent tongue, and use your eyes if you have them. . . . But he'd sooner use his eyes on the originals,' she broke off, 'I know him. Do you know Johnny?' She snapped at Quentin suddenly.

'I've met him,' said Quentin, who began to see light slowly.

'Met him? And he amused you? Ah, but he's hard to know. He'll catch a likeness in a miniature to a girl he knows—a living girl—this cousin or that he's danced with—and good-night to the rest. That's what it is to be young—a treasure of treasures too! Why, the pearls alone would have paid my house-rent for a year,—and he said I'd stolen it, the rascal! *Stolen*, do you hear?'

Quentin had a shock : but with the strange anguish of her tone, the situation came clear to him. At that point of her rambling discourse, it would be fair to say he divined the whole. His hostess had lost, or thought she had lost, this 'treasure' she spoke of, trusted to her expert care by the benefactor and friend. She was overcome, out of her mind, at the mere vision of such a betrayal of her trust, and at such a moment above all. Like all extremely nervous subjects, Miss Darcy could not in her emotion trust her own senses, and she wanted the support of his. That explained her private summons, and her pitiful agitation, very simply. Only, why his, not Jill's? It crossed his mind promptly to wonder why.

His surmise was quickly justified. Miss Darcy sought, or rather produced, a little key. She had actually been holding it all the time in the palm of her shaking hand. She handed it to her visitor, and directed him to a certain cabinet, clamped to the wall, as Quentin happened to perceive. He asked which drawer, and she told him the top one. The top one was empty, he explained. It must be the second then, she said. The second was full. Quentin went through innumerable little packets of soft paper, and softer wool, all most daintily wrapped and clearly labelled,—scraps she had saved from her father's lordly collection in old days. He would fain have lingered over some of them, but could not, in kindness. There was no miniature in any, and so he told her, in the firm easy manner that seemed to reassure her best.

'The third!' barked Miss Darcy, watching him with anguished eyes. He knew at once the third drawer was where the beloved portrait ought to be. It went to his heart to see the efforts the poor old creature made to act indifference, when he was forced to tell her, that among the many miniatures in the third drawer, there was none with a pearl frame.

'Dear, dear,' she said, 'then I have put it somewhere. My memory's getting so bad. It's because I sleep so poorly—insomnia—young folk never know the torment of

that. I cannot send you to hunt in my bedroom,—no. Well, well, then I must show you another day.'

Her simple anguish was evident at his failure to find the thing she had already, probably, sought in every corner of her orderly collections in vain. It troubled Quentin to leave her in such a condition, but he saw not how he could enquire more. He knew already from Jill that she suffered from sleeplessness cruelly, and had tried innumerable cures for it in vain ; and this loss, if it proved to be one in reality, was enough to craze if not to kill her, he privately thought. Yet the responsibility was certainly hers, and he could take no steps to help without impertinence, beyond those she required of him. He had a strong impression always of her innate honour and dignity, delicacy also, broken as she was ; and he saw she wished, insofar as it was possible, to stand alone. The matter lay between her and the Ingestre family : no third party could properly intervene.

Outside Miss Darcy's dwelling, in the backwater of the old London square, he lingered deliberately, intending to catch Jill coming back from church. The church was just round the corner, he could see its spire, and the hour made it probable the congregation would soon be out. His design, clear to himself as always, was to judge how far Jill had penetrated Miss Darcy's state of secret woe, and whether she had been allowed to guess its origin in the portrait's loss. Not of Miss Darcy's own accord, he was certain, having thought over the matter. She was really fond of the girl, and for nothing in the world would she let Jill suppose that blame or suspicion might attach to her. On the other hand, Miss Jill was very sharp, and her patroness feeble and not always mistress of herself, when her nerves were out of gear. The girl might at least be able to throw some light upon the subject.

There Quentin stopped, in order to look into his own feelings. It would not do to let himself drift into a cynical

attitude towards the girl. He waited, where a tree of the square garden overhung the paling, for it was a very warm day. He was asking himself, as often before, what he really thought of her: why his judgment did not cry out at once, as his aunt's or his sister's would have done, at the idea of her being suspected of a common theft.

It was, he could only believe, that she was different in his company from what she was with Miss Darcy, his sister, or his aunt. She would not, ever, meet him on equal terms. She preferred to posture and undulate, give him soft answers, play her little games. Why? He could not answer, or rather he would not,—it annoyed him too much. There were times when he had broken off the dialogue, so conscious was he of what he called her insincerity: that is, of the fact that she was shadowing him, giving him the reply he wanted, or that she imagined he wanted, rather than the facts she knew. Now, in the matter of her father, it was of first-rate importance that he should know as well. She should have seen that. Yet it was so she always answered him, watching his face with her little glances, declaring that she never saw Jacoby, had dropped all communication,—always in so sweet a manner that Quentin failed to trust. The shying of his spirit before her methods was at moments so violent that he felt he could see no more of her,—that he must leave her case. But the case, to his cooler brain, was interesting: Miss Darcy asked him to visit her, and somehow, Jill was always there.

Leaning against the paling in the shade, he looked back along the side of the square he had traversed, to be sure that none of the figures issuing from the church direction were Jill's. He was just moving on again, determining to make the tour of the square, and if she were not in sight, go home, when he was aware of two figures proceeding in the opposite direction, as though to meet the church-going crowd. Far off as they were, Quentin knew both at a glance. It was Jacoby and the woman with whom he lived. They

were debating eagerly and privately, and looking neither to right nor left.

'There!' thought Quentin. It was the summing up of many doubts, and a challenge to his sister, with her obstinate 'pukka' about Jill. Sharp on that came the thought that now he could test her, for those two must have been purposing to meet her, the coincidence was too flagrant otherwise. So he waited where he was, severe in the shadow, biting his lip.

Ten,—twelve minutes by his watch elapsed, while groups of people from the church crossed steadily. They diminished to an occasional figure: then the little figure he expected appeared. She turned the corner, hurrying rather, having doubtless guessed she was late; but as usual, neither haste nor her infirmity could make her ungraceful, any more than small means and lack of leisure could make her ill-dressed. Her eyes peered out under a wide sun-hat,—too wide, since some men looked after her,—but most becoming to her little kitten-face. She looked charming, dangerously: and the line of Quentin's young mouth took a sardonic turn. Through the thick shadow of the trees he walked towards her, but she did not see him coming at first. He was nearly opposite Miss Darcy's door before she spied him, and then she showed no atom of discomposure, though her colour was a little heightened when they met.

'You are coming in?' was her first remark, looking innocent and sweet.

'No,' he said. 'I've been with Miss Darcy. I only waited a minute or two, in case you came.'

She merely smiled at him: it was enough, he hastened on.

'Do you always go to church alone?'

She nodded. 'Always. It is my holiday.'

'She's been expecting you,' said Quentin: the policeman, which is part of the English official character, rising in him as he spoke. 'Are you always so late?'

'No,' said Jill. 'It was a long sermon. Though not so

long as in Geneva,' she added pensively. Standing by him, she slipped her hand through his arm. Quentin was in the act of drawing it away, when he remembered. She had the best excuse for using him as a walking-stick, after all.

'Miss Darcy doesn't seem well,' he said abruptly.

'She is old,' said Jill, and sighed. 'It will not last long.' She looked thoughtfully at the house.

'Would you be glad to get away from her?' said Quentin. He suspected it. Her look was 'wild as grass' in the sun this morning.

'Oh, no. . . . But she is tiresome sometimes. She takes things to make her sleep, and then, next day, she is cross.'

'Has she been more cross than usual, lately?'

She looked at him. 'You found her so?' she said, with the prettiest concern. 'Perhaps, if I had been there——'

Quentin did not rise to it: he never rose to personalities from Jill. 'I thought she might be worrying about something,' he said.

She waited a second, and then laughed sweetly. 'Possibly me,' she said. 'You mean that? She is always anxious about me when I am out. And I must tell her all that has passed, when I come in again. I do that very well, the telling.' She glanced at him. 'I shall to-day.'

'What will you tell her?' said Quentin, unwisely. He happened to want to know what had passed, while she was out.

'I shall tell her I met you,' said Jill, her eyes gleaming. 'Then she will know that you did not come for her alone.'

He bit his lip again for a moment. The idea that his company could be in dispute, between a woman of sixty, and a child of sixteen! He could have laughed, and yet—Unchildish, to say the least, that flash of jealousy.

He tried probing a little longer, but she was too much for him. Or else she was completely innocent. But since she constantly tried to lead him off the subject,—his subject,—into the personal realm, he suspected she was not so completely innocent as she seemed.

'I saw your father last week,' he observed abruptly,—his last card.

Her bright look faded. She made a slight grimace. 'He? Is he still in London?' she said. As he was completely silent, words cut off, she looked up at him anxiously. Then her hand dropped off his arm.

'I do not want him,' she said fiercely. 'Qu'il me fiche la paix! I will kill myself if he comes here,—tell him that.'

'You needn't be frightened,' said Quentin pacifically, feeling repentant for the moment. 'He won't come to the house, anyhow: I think I can promise that. He knows the danger, when you are really getting on,—if you make it clear to him also.'

'Frightened?' she repeated. 'I am not frightened,—ever,—unless you frighten me.'

'I'm sorry. Did I?'

Once more, his tone was cold. After waiting a minute, with a murmur that she was late, she ran into the house.

Well, what was a reasonable man, with a logical mind, to make of a creature like that? Reason was not in her. If Quentin had been less than so completely English, he would have shrugged as he walked away.

What does the barrister do when the witness, held at arms'-length for cross-examination, creeps round the arm in order to get closer to him? A wise barrister drops the case. Quentin dropped it, shook her off temporarily, while he walked home at full speed. But her bright beseeching eyes, her clinging hand,—the hand that clung because of physical need,—came back to him at times, when he was sleepless and overworked. It was a hot season, and the glittering heat of towns propagates the microbes of worry and self-question, as well as many more. He often lay wakeful, rigid, vexed in mind over many things, and that lame girl-child among the many.

However, countless of Quentin's former friends had

worse heat-fevers to contend with in India, as he told himself constantly : and his country holiday in the cool green north was not far distant : so he worked on, and did not complain.

Two or three weeks after that, when hardly any but the workers were still in town, Quentin was congratulated, —twice in one day.

He bore this most trying and unexpected situation with all the grace a young man can summon on the spur of the moment, for his chivalry sprang awake to protect Helena's name. He said he was much honoured by the report, but the report was false : and begged his informants to contradict it at the source whence they had derived it, instantly.

But worse was to follow. Quentin was still working in London up to the verge of his holiday in the last days of August, almost solitary, for his acquaintance had scattered to the four winds during the month. His aunt was at his sister's cottage in Gloucestershire, young Mrs. Ingestre in Yorkshire with her husband, Mrs. Falkland, so he understood, had gone abroad, the Captain and Harold were golfing, and Helena was alone, alone and resting, at the old country home in the West. Quentin feared his letter would be a shock to her when it came, but there was no avoiding it.

'DEAR MISS FALKLAND,' he wrote. (They had long been on the verge of Christian names in speech, but not in writing.)

'I feel I ought to tell you at once, if you have not happened to meet it, that a report has got about of our engagement, heaven knows how. Worse than that, the "Post" has published a notice. You may trust me to choke off the report, at every opportunity I have, and some of my friends are dealing with it too. The notice, I think, had better be contradicted from head-quarters : and as I have not got Captain Falkland's address, I let

you know on the spot and enclose the slip. I never heard of a false report of that nature getting into print before, and I can't help suspecting ill-will or a bad joke behind it.

'I need not tell you how awfully sorry I am,—it is bound to be loathsome for you, especially just now, when you thought you had got rid of chatterers. If I thought anything I had done with you, or said about you, could have misled people, I should cut my throat, or get Harold to do it, instantly. But I think we can boast of a strong position, and snub scandal-mongers to our hearts' content. After all, it is on the verge of the silly season, and the papers must say something, mustn't they?

'One more thing. I have written to Harold that I retire from the expedition, I need not say with what regret; but if the fashionable press is following your doings *already* with such close interest, I shall certainly not seem to track you more than necessary, so Mrs. Falkland can be reassured. Don't trouble to answer this, since Harold says you are fagged and resting. I thought it preferable to write to you direct in the circumstances.

'Yours very sincerely,

'QUENTIN AUBERON.'

Helena, that same evening, despatched three letters. She was not a voluminous writer at any time, so we may give them in their entirety.

'DEAR MR. AUBERON,

'Thank you. Father will contradict it. Now listen.

'If there was a question of anyone retiring from the expedition, in consequence of a mere mistake like that, which is *not* a scandal after all,—it would be me. But I shall not,—I stick to our bargain. I do not think the fashionable news is following my doings to the extent you imagine, to begin with: to go on with, there *is* no fashionable news, thanks to mercy, within twelve miles of Keswick.

Last of all, we should defeat our own ends by separating, since such numbers of our friends know of the plan.

‘I think, when you want to defeat lying, whether ill-natured or merely silly,—I can’t say which this is,—the straightforward course is bound to be the best. Our thoughts and intentions in doing the thing are what matter finally, not the thing we do. My thoughts and intentions are very windy, with rocks sticking up in the right places, and blue in the distance behind them, and springy underfoot. I believe yours are the same, and I am certain Harold’s are. Harold’s last letter, which was long, was entirely about his boots. Do please get a better pair if you can manage it, or he will be unbearable on the subject, all the time.

‘Yours very sincerely,

‘HELENA F. FALKLAND.’

That was Quentin’s first letter from the beautiful Miss Falkland, and he kept it.

‘DEAR FATHER’ (ran the second to the Captain),

‘I enclose this slip if you have not seen it. I don’t suppose you read the fashionable column in the “Post.” Will you do the proper thing about it *at once*, with full authority from me and Mr. Auberon (enclosed) to contradict it *flat*.

‘I have written nothing to Mother about it so far, but I have myself a theory, which I think might just explain. You know that very strange young —— I have refused at least half a dozen times. Lately he has seemed determined to annoy me, and he dislikes Q. A., and I believe might possibly do a thing like that. Only you understand I have no earthly evidence, so you will be careful, won’t you, Father dear, and not get angry too soon. It is perplexing, isn’t it,—I feel like sorcery somewhere. Never mind.

‘I am quite well, absolutely, so do not worry about me. I am only growing old very fast, with these rather startling adventures. I can’t think of your kindness that day in the

Park without crying, still, which must mean I am a little nervous : but the mountains will soon cure that. Yet it is so terrible to be *trusted*, in life, that sometimes I would prefer an Elizabethan father, who beat me *hard*.

‘ Yours,

‘ H.’

The third letter was the shortest of all.

‘ DEAR MR. INGESTRE,

‘ It is not true. Three days, I have counted, you have thought it true, and it is not. And your mother so terribly ill, the papers say, and I can only send this little word to help you. Praying is no use to you, is it ?

‘ H. F. F.’

She sent that to the London address : guessing what was the fact, that John would have been recalled to town.

III

Self-deception is an extraordinary thing. It is wonderful and terrible to mark, in life, the extent to which human beings are capable of wilfully blinding themselves, shutting away the truth. To a student, the soul of Ursula would have been an interesting enigma at this period. She knew, in the honest depths of her, that her husband was struggling with such a passion as shakes a man once in his lifetime,—a passion for another than herself. He had shown it her clearly, had barely made an attempt to conceal. She refused, in the superficial layers of her daily thinking, to admit it at all. A girl of nineteen, indeed ! —it was the last indignity : consequently, since she retained her dignity unimpaired, it could not be. As conviction, slowly and inevitably, crept upon her, she fought with greater fury, setting her whole will to resist. It could not be,—it was not,—at least long enough to deceive completely nearly all those with whom she came in contact.

In this dangerously distempered condition of the human mind, when truth does pierce unaware it hurts the more. It inspires the greater fury, and occasionally drives a sufferer—even as sensible as Ursula—to do a thoroughly foolish thing. This is the only way in which we can account for the strange step referred to in the foregoing letters: a step which was so wild, so utterly unlike Ursula to everybody who knew her, that only one person, and that the cleverest of her acquaintance, ever suspected her at all. Barring that person, she remained absolutely secure from suspicion, all her days, even amid the superior and sceptical intelligences of her husband's family.

It was over a letter from Mrs. Falkland that the idea came to her, or rather that the emotions came that prompted the idea. John brought her the letter, one of the last days before they left London, and while he was still preoccupied by his mother's state, and doubting whether he should go north at all. He had not fought Ursula's proposal to accompany him to Yorkshire: indeed he hardly seemed to have taken it in, a sign of his great unrest and distraction of mind. In that condition, he was apt to be passive, domestically, and Ursula had her own way and had made all the arrangements in advance. Already John was going to be much more comfortable at Routhwick than he could possibly have been if he had not accepted her. This was balm to Ursula's conscience, of course, for adding to his daily and nightly weariness by forcing her presence on him when he preferred to be alone.

He handed the letter to her in her workroom, and in so doing, he asked her idly what she had been addressing to herself.

'That's Mrs. Falkland's handwriting,' said Ursula.

'Go on!' said Johnny. He was really incredulous. There was certainly a marked likeness between their sloping pointed hands, both of the old-fashioned order; though Ursula was surprised his sharp eyes should be deceived.

'You'd better forge me a cheque or two,' he remarked as he left the room. 'She's a rich woman,—growing richer, old Samuel says. It might be useful at a pinch.'

Mrs. Falkland's letters, increasingly frequent, grew in intimacy also. She was determined to know Ursula. They were also long, and Mrs. Ingestre was prepared to be bored : however she read it through to the end.

Mrs. Falkland was going away, abroad for a month. This was a relief, since Ursula had feared she might propose a visit to Routhwick. John would never stand her, even for a couple of nights. . . . The doctor advised—Ursula passed it over. Mrs. Falkland was so concerned to hear Ursula had put off her own nice plan of Sophienbad, they might have met, et cetera. Yet so easily understood in the circumstances, one's husband's family, so trying for them all—the reader's eye slipped on.

'Dear Helena is looking run-down, really I think London tries her. After all, as Father says, she was born a country lass. She will be alone here for a bit, since Father is going to his golfing-place. However, the three have their plan for September, all fixed up, so that will be nice for all parties. I depend so much on Quentin's good sense, really, for both of them. . . . What you allude to about him interests me. I had noticed something of that nature myself, though of course you know mothers go for nothing in these days. Indeed it would be a nice thing, suitable as you say. Howard pished as usual, when I mentioned it in his hearing, but I tell him a girl must marry sometime, and he could not wish a better kind of man. Then Father said Helena was to use her own judgment, and time before her, and so on, as of course there is ; so I have said nothing to the child at present, though one cannot fail to notice little signs. It is my idea, though safer not to repeat it, that they are corresponding regularly. After all when a girl of that age goes to meet the post——'

That was where Ursula stopped. It was there her judgment exclaimed 'You fool!' to the complacent

mother, and her honesty admitted whence the daughter's letters came. She knew it as well as though she had seen John's handwriting upon them. There was a single convulsion, or contraction of rage within her, no more : then, as she believed, she mastered it. At least she read on calmly to the letter's end.

But truth so treated has her revenge. There is a truthful hour of the early dawn, well known to all unhappy people, when sleep on the one hand withdraws its flattering wing, and no day on the other has appeared to warm our hopes : a time when nature prefers that man should not be conscious, unless for the most solemn watches of birth or death. It was then Ursula awoke in an empty room,—a room in that horror of emptiness familiar places have when dismantled for packing, hinting a season's desertion in advance. Looking about her, she knew the chill of despair, and all her customary safe-guards failed. She knew Helena beloved by John as she was not, as she never had been : that the whole of his thoughts all day, all night, possibly at this moment where he was sleeping beneath his father's roof, were with her, that chit, that child, in her western home. Ursula lay rigid, the poison spreading within her to deadly hatred,—she let it for once have its way. She admitted the devil, and the devil proposed hatred of Helena, of Helena's silly mother, but first and foremost of him. Then, having suggested every conceivable relief in vain,—for Ursula in the dawn was still ascetic, armed, and miserable,—he whispered in quitting her a mischievous idea.

'Print,' said the devil,—or one of his imps that haunt the regions of sleep.

The devil does not like dignity, of course, in his victims, since he pretends, on all accounts, to so much majesty himself. Or he may simply have wished to tease her, having failed to tempt,—we will not vouch for the Satanic psychology. Like other hard workers in the world, he has to amuse himself, and he probably saw his opportunity.

Ursula rejected it as folly of the night, absurd. By full daylight, she would barely think of it, it seemed so silly. What could be the advantage, to anybody, since it must be contradicted the next day? Yet there was, even by full daylight, a subtle flavour, refreshment,—entertainment almost,—in the thought of her husband seeing that eminently reasonable forecast, printed. There is that about print,—still,—which persuades: its uniform is respected. A printed lie would reach him, hurt for the moment, the more that he admitted a liking for the man. He would not regard the rumours, of course, his vanity saved him: but that would trip him, vanity and all,—it must.

So the idea did not really leave her; and in the first recurrence of her fury, one morning in Yorkshire, when his indifference had goaded her passingly, she wrote off the announcement to one of the papers he regularly saw. She enclosed it with some others, to be posted by her house-keeper in London. Having finished it, forged the Falkland name, she was terrified, rather pleasantly. It was a crime,—the first of her life, she was sure. There was a thrill in committing a secret crime, as there would be in repenting it. She barely thought of detection, she was so accustomed to her own prestige,—rightly, as it proved,—but remorse, even lengthy remorse was probably in store for her. It might be, she faced the penalty,—at least she would see him suffer first.

She did not see it. She lost that consolation completely, owing to her untoward fate. The morning the lie was circulated in the London paper was the same morning that her husband was himself summoned south, by a message whose curtness suggested urgency. Ursula offered to accompany him, but was rejected. Her plans failed at every point.

At the terminus, Johnny's father came to meet him,—a surprising event. It was the last thing he would have done at common times; and had he been as quick as usual,

Johnny would have guessed that a stronger impulse than kindness,—say curiosity,—must have prompted such an effort on his father's part.

As a fact, Mr. Ingestre's mother had called his attention to the notice of the Falkland girl's engagement in the 'Post' that morning, and both had wondered, though in different degrees, how Johnny would take it. Old Mrs. Ingestre had prophesied it, of course, for long: she had spent a month in industrious prophecy; so that her son's measure of wonder, over the crowning incident, exceeded hers. Mr. Ingestre was most genuinely curious as to the effect on Johnny, even apprehensive in a remote degree. His appearance in the evening at the station was the direct result.

The way his son winced and whitened at the sight of him was the first hint that Johnny, summoned with such enigmatic curtness, might give his unlooked-for appearance another interpretation.

'All right,' were his first rather hasty words, in consequence,—'she's asleep. Sorry if I startled you, but it comes and goes. She may weather it again, Ashwin says, though he doubted it this morning. That's why I wired, have to take the professional's word.'

It approached an apology, and Johnny accepted it with a nod, but his worn and sulky look did not alter. Anxiety soon spent him, as his father knew. Not a woman of that waiting family group but could stand the shocks and retardations of a long illness better than 'the boy,'—so they recognised. It was not only that he loved his mother, it was that he was made differently, faced all things differently. It was vexatious, but true.

'Where's Ursula?' said Mr. Ingestre, as his son pulled his few possessions out of the train.

'At Routhwick,' grunted Johnny. 'I told her she'd not be wanted.'

'One for Ursula,' thought Mr. Ingestre, rather pleased. It always pleased him that a man should prove master in

his own household ; and in this case he thought that Ursula's unskilful tactics, as exercised on her husband, deserved the snub. He had no doubt she would have preferred, and was probably prepared, to come to London. Ursula's perfect correctness, on all occasions, was a thing on which the family counted, though they pretended to scoff.

' Seen the papers ? ' he proceeded blandly, since Johnny's back was conveniently turned.

' No,' he said, after a pause.

He could act, of course : yet his father was pretty clear, after a few minutes' further experiment, that he had not. He had started early, and the London papers arrived at Routhwick late. In the train he had had the news of the day, it seemed, but had doubtless been too worried to glance at it. At least his eye had not fallen on the dangerous paragraph, and Mr. Ingestre, for some reason, breathed more freely. It struck him perhaps as rather rough luck that the two blows should fall on the boy at once, though in general he would have said such shocks to his self-assurance were good for Johnny. That had been, at least, throughout his son's youth, his own educational principle.

They went together to Johnny's house, since he had business there, and his mother's state of exhaustion, as described by the doctor, gave him time. On arrival he looked sharply through the letters that were awaiting him, and then pocketed, without opening, one of them. Nothing to be made by his father out of that. The house was in the hands of workmen, watched over by the caretaker, a lady of a bland and impervious appearance, and a self-satisfied smile, calculated to arouse Ingestre passions to the uttermost. Johnny interviewed this woman on certain points for Ursula, and heard out some lengthy complaints of the workmen and what not, in silence. His father looked on the while, unwillingly impressed. He did business rapidly,—it was not that. He had never doubted his son could govern, for all his careless ways. He only heard what complaints were necessary, checked the rest,

and planted his orders plainly and patiently too. It was that patience, and low clear tone—his stage-tone, well-measured and directed,—that was unusual. He did not even swear when, having finally disposed things to his taste upon his premises, he was stopped again by the caretaker, just as the car was moving off. She came out on the step, rolling her hands in her apron in a complacent and leisurely fashion, having lifted one to detain the chauffeur, with an air that made that lofty functionary snort.

‘What now?’ said Johnny, turning.

‘Begging your pardon, sir, I was forgetting. A lady called.’

‘Hullo!’ thought John the elder, at the speaking change in his son’s face.

‘Said she must see you, sir,—most pressing she was. Had no idea you were gone away.’

‘Did she ask for me or Mrs. Ingestre?’ said Johnny.

‘You, sir. That’s why I——’

‘Had she a name?’

‘Oh yes, sir, certainly: but she didn’t leave a card. Said you’d know her without, sir.’

‘Without a name?’ said John the elder.

‘Fool!’ muttered John the younger. He looked straight at his father under his haughty eyelids,—they were facing one another in the car. ‘Perhaps she said she’d write,’ he said to the woman.

‘Yes, she did, sir. She’d write immediate. I gave her your address.’

‘Genius!’ said Johnny, less discreetly. ‘Well,—and she was young and beautiful, wasn’t she?’

‘No, sir. No indeed, sir. More like a gentleman to look at, you’d say.’

‘Dressed like a gentleman?’ said Johnny.

‘What is this pastoral?’ said Mr. Ingestre to nobody.

Low as both spoke, they were very audible, and the driver had his hand across his mouth. The caretaker also was fingering her chin with her plump hand, but not, it

appeared, for the same reason. Johnny saw the gesture first, and interpreted.

'The Honourable Darcy,' he said to his father. 'Bet you it was. A beard, had the lady?—right, I'll go.' He nodded to the woman, and the car started.

'What's the Honourable Darcy want with you?' said Mr. Ingestre, though without much interest.

'Don't know,—I'll see.' Johnny was equally absent. Suddenly, however, he moved, and called to the chauffeur. 'We're passing her place,' he informed his father, 'or close by. I'll see her now,—it won't take long.'

'Rubbish,' snapped Mr. Ingestre, who happened to want his company. 'You've not dined.'

'I don't want to,' said Johnny.

'That's nonsense,—you'll need your strength later. It's nothing but restlessness,' he added, rousing. 'Why can't you ever stick to one thing at a time?'

Mr. Ingestre found himself upon a familiar tack. Scores of times, he had said that in youth to Johnny. 'Young dodger,—never know where to have him,'—were the least abusive epithets addressed to his mother concerning him.

Johnny proceeded now to dodge and defeat him just in his old style. He intended to see Miss Darcy. His excuses mounted in absurdity in proportion as his father's impatience increased. They wrangled for half a mile, and called contrary directions to the chauffeur. When that official, who was a philosopher, drew up at the entrance to Miss Darcy's square, Johnny unlatched the door with a jerk.

'Mother's fond of her,' he said sulkily as he got out. 'There might be something I could do.'

He remained with Miss Darcy a good hour. Finally, his father had to start dinner without him.

'Well, did you see her?' he said, when his son chose at last to join him, from the floor above, where he had been interviewing his mother's doctor.

'No,' said Johnny, looking a trifle sulkier than before.

'He says it could do neither of us any good to-night. That's the way he puts it. Jolly careful of our feelings, aren't they, these medical swells. He's been talking to her quite a lot.'

His father waited a minute, rather taken aback. 'I alluded to Miss Darcy,' he explained. 'As for Ashwin, you can trust him. I broke through his orders once about your mother, and regretted it.'

'Why?' said Johnny roughly. 'Did he curse you?'

'No,—I cursed him, for being right. I can't do with these infallible people.'

'Should have thought it was what you paid him for,' said Johnny. 'I like Ashwin, he's got manners. Hand us the bread knife, will you?'

The meal proceeded on these terms, with little or nothing said; nothing agreeable or confidential anyhow: merely the brief remarks that strangers might have offered to avoid the burden of silence. Wretched as they both were, and for just the same causes, they could not communicate by natural means. That each had the wit to penetrate the other's thought made things no better between them, rather worse. They shortened the meal by mutual consent and adjourned to the study, where, with the help of smoke, things were a little better. But even so, it did not last. Johnny, having strolled about a little, was the first to open fire.

'Since you're at leisure, father,' he started, addressing the newspaper in which his sire was shrouded, 'we might as well get it done. Fact is, that poor old thing's in a devil of a coil, and it's my fault.'

'Yours? Who are you speaking about?' The newspaper dropped.

'Miss Darcy. I—er—thought you enquired.'

'I did, about an hour since,' said Mr. Ingestre, folding the paper back with care. 'I'm ready to hear,' he added.

'Well, there was something in it, as I supposed. It took some time to make her speak, she was so frightened, but I got it at last.'

'Well?' said his father. Johnny spoke with an effort, in jerks, so he began to be suspicious.

'Well, you know the Hope miniature of the Maréchale, with the pearls, in the Hall collection,—little lady in pink.'

'Yes, yes. What of it?'

'I took it across to show her, once upon a time.'

'You'd no business to,' snapped his father.

'Mother knew of it.' A pause. 'She said—old Darcy—we'd no notion of its value, not the pearls but the picture. I said I had a very good notion.'

'It's the picture of an uncommon pretty woman,' said Mr. Ingestre.

'That's the kind of thing I said,' said Johnny. 'She swore we were none of us fit to have it, and all the good things in England were in hands equally frivolous and incompetent. She stuck to it herself in consequence. Mother and I told everyone she had stolen it, knowing the old miser was as safe as a house. Well,—'

'Well?' said his father impatiently.

'She's lost it,' said Johnny, looking in front of him. 'So it seems.'

'Confound her,' said Mr. Ingestre,—only he said worse.

'She's almost out of her mind,' observed Johnny.

'She's long been that,' said Mr. Ingestre, getting up.

'It's nerves,' said Johnny, 'no more. Her faculties are quite in order, as I proved.' He eyed his father cautiously a minute. 'It's no earthly use going round to rag her, she won't find it the more for that. I've done everything that can be done, for the moment. It's a case for a doctor, I should say.'

'It's a case for a magistrate,' said Mr. Ingestre, 'or a madhouse. She can take her choice. If it's lost,' he added, 'I shall hold you responsible.'

'I hold myself,' said Johnny. 'It's my loss as much as yours. Don't lose your temper.'

That produced the required effect. Johnny had known it must come, of course, for the last half-hour, so he hurried

it up, in a gracious and filial manner, by his final remark, and let loose the furies. He seized the opportunity himself to get several things said, which he had wanted to say for some time past. Anyone unaccustomed to their methods would have been sure such language could never have been lived down on either side without murder committed, a formal meeting, or a law-suit at least. But the servant who brought the coffee in the midst of it took the domestic situation with great calm. Mr. John's return to town practically implied it, granted 'the master's' irascible condition, which had been known to his household for weeks. They quite looked forward to Mr. Johnny, since he was bound to conduct the lightning upon himself, sooner or later,—and after that things would be more comfortable.

Which was the case. Later, Mrs. Ingestre's doctor, who looked in before he left, was received with elaborate courtesy and friendliness, by both parties. John and his father even took Sir Claude's expert advice as to what, in the problem of Miss Darcy's nerves—carefully detailed—would be the best steps to take concerning the treasure she had lost, or was concealing. The doctor heard the evidence out, scarcely needing to cross-question, and temporised, advising them to wait a while before either the police, or the commissioners of lunacy, were applied to. Sir Claude said gently that, granted an old lady of the kind described, the piece of property 'might turn up' in the course of a week or two, in some quite obvious place that would suddenly come to her mind. He gave a few gentle opinions of the same moderate nature on his patient: then he said good-night to the pair in the study, and went his way.

When he had gone, John the elder dropped into a chair. 'Clever fellow, Ashwin,' he remarked.

'Never says all he thinks,' said Johnny pensively.

'Tricks of the trade,' said Mr. Ingestre. He crossed his legs, and took up his former newspaper, glancing round once as he did so. 'You get to bed, my lad,' he advised. 'You've had enough.' He had observed Johnny was

always more exhausted than he by their little encounters, though he showed up in style at the time.

‘Well then, sit down,’ was his next suggestion.

But no, Johnny preferred as usual to rest on his legs, and air his thoughts at a six-foot attitude. He stood where he was in his glory, while his natural authority, infirm and useless, lay in his chair.

Being thus disobeyed, and within range, Mr. Ingestre touched him with his foot in a manner of careless patronage, or ownership,—much as a trainer might a fine young dog, in taking stock of a pack he had reared. This was one of his habitual manners when he was feeling amiable: and a good example of a manner no parent should ever indulge in, unless he wants to be detested.

‘Perhaps we’re both out of condition a bit,’ he suggested, as his son flushed and moved aside. Johnny did not consider, and never had considered, that he was his father’s property. He simply could not get the point of view.

‘Speak for yourself,’ he said, turning his back. ‘My condition’s all it should be, ask Fox.’ Fox was the agent at Routhwick. ‘He and I have hardly been out of the saddle except to eat and sleep for ten days past.’

‘Really?’ said Mr. Ingestre pleasantly. ‘I say, what a palpitating life for Ursula.’

Silence from Johnny. His next remark surprised his father.

‘I shall have to talk to her about this business,’ he said, half to himself.

‘To Ursula? The miniature? What next?’

‘Keep cool,’ advised Johnny. ‘I’d not really done when you broke out before. Fact is, there’s another inmate in the Darcy ménage,—a girl Ursula saw fit to recommend, on a charitable inspiration, because she had a good-for-nothing father. Disreputable,’ said Johnny, ‘was the word. Used by Ursula it misses its full sense, but still . . .’

‘Ha,’ said Mr. Ingestre, smoking in his chair, ‘You interviewed the girl, I suppose.’

'No,' said Johnny. 'Darcy won't hear a breath against the girl. As to the father, Ursula never let out that damaging fact, it seems: and she only let it out to me,' he added reflectively, 'in confidence.'

'Confidence?' said Mr. Ingestre, with a queer look.

'A trifle forced, perhaps,' said Johnny.

'What dashed bad business,' said Mr. Ingestre, after thought, 'not to let the employer know. I thought Ursula had some business intelligence.'

'It's liable to be obscured by kindness,' said Johnny. 'Ursula would tell you her business was to get the girl in somewhere, by any means. That's what they call charity,—political jobbing's nothing to it.' Having thus amused himself, he added,—'I dare say Ursula wanted to spare the old freak fretting as well. Only she might have chosen a better way of doing it, that's all. If she'd seen the state she was in to-night—well—' John cast about for a comparison, but none seemed adequate. 'Not worth it, you know,' he finished frowning. 'No fun.'

His father was not naturally sympathetic, but it did occur to him at this juncture that the boy's own nerves might have suffered in the interview, since he had undoubtedly inherited that womanish commodity from some quarter of the family: and also that, for the same reason, he had probably manœuvred Miss Darcy the 'freak' extremely well, during the short time granted him for the operation. Neither of these two thoughts had occurred to Mr. Ingestre before, and it was hard to say what could prompt them; unless it was a likeness to Agatha, crossing Johnny's face as he stood reflecting, half turned away. In reflection, he often had a look of her,—it was true Mr. Ingestre's own family did not waste much time over the art.

'Do you know anything of the girl?' he demanded.

'I happen to,—yes. She's an artist, and highly impressionable,—the usual thing. A bad man, really bad, could get her under his thumb. Not a common blackguard, because she's not a common girl.'

'How do you know that?' said his father. 'Second-hand?'

'First-hand,' said Johnny. 'So do you if you were attending. She played Celia and Rosalind in succession under your nose, that Sunday at my place.'

'Good—Gad!' Mr. Ingestre shifted his position, interested. 'Oh well, granted a genius, of course, anything may occur. You won't see that painting again in your lifetime, Johnny.'

'You've stopped suspecting Miss Darcy, have you?' said Johnny. 'I thought you might, in time.'

'If you're inventing this——' said his father wrathfully.

'I'm not. Only I've no more evidence against the one than the other. If anything, the betting's against Darcy, because she knows the value of the thing, and the girl does not.'

'She might, of the pearls,' grunted Mr. Ingestre. It was a poor contention, as the pearls were worth about a quarter of the painting, signed as it was by a celebrated hand. 'And she might have heard the patronne talking,' he proceeded.

'That shows how little you know our bearded friend,' said Johnny. 'Her discretion's absolute, and she has shown the thing, she insists, to nobody. She carried it with her once to a museum, to compare with a replica or something: and when she got back she was tired, and gave it, still wrapped up, to the girl to put away. Miss Celia did so under her eyes, and brought her back the key. After that, Darcy was laid up for a month, more or less, and has only just discovered its absence from the drawer. She's looked, she assures me, everywhere.'

'Has she good eyes?' said Mr. Ingestre.

'So much so she's unable to believe them. She made me and another man she trusts look too.'

'Hey? What other man?'

Johnny glanced at him under his eyelids. 'A walking-safe of a man,' he said at leisure 'Church, State, and the

Ten Commandments. A man even you would trust on sight.'

'You know him, eh?'

'I do,—so does Granny: she'd back me up. Personally,' said Johnny, 'I'd put the whole job into young Auberon's hands on spec., since he's already behind-scenes about the girl's connections. I only want a word from you to write to him.'

'Auberon,' pondered Mr. Ingestre. Momentarily abstracted, he gave his son carte blanche to act as he proposed, with unusual carelessness. Auberon,—that was the name!

The morning's paper was lying within reach of Johnny's hand on the table, but Johnny seemed completely incurious about the fashionable news to-day. Also, his father had been unable, for some reason, to broach the subject,—there had been, he told himself, no chance.

Now, here was the chance, a perfectly natural opening, as good as any diplomatist could desire. Mr. Ingestre had, therefore, to admit a real unwillingness to lead into the subject, an apprehension as to possible results that grew by waiting. No sooner had he realised this shrinking in himself, than he resolved to risk it. Turning, he cleared his throat.

'Is that the "Post"?' he began. 'If you're not using it, I'll take a look.'

Silence from Johnny, who seemed not to have heard the remark. He was standing by the table, in the lamplight, motionless as usual, when he was not in violent action, half turned away. He seemed to be reading something, with his head bent, so his father waited a little. He spent the interval till he chose to attend in taking stock of him, as before, but with something less than his former complacency. Some consideration had crept in since, as it seemed, to mar his contentment with his own production.

The boy had mentioned his own 'condition' lately,—condition was the word. Johnny had the conscience of his generation in those matters, and he had kept control,

visibly, at every point. Admirably, insolently 'fit' to the trainer's eye, not a doubt of it. That such a figure of a youth should not have strong sons of his own to succeed him was wrong,—it was bad management,—on the part of the heavens, of course. In any other case, Mr. Ingestre would have said something ought to be done about it : in this case it was difficult to devise an alternative course to that of his own tradition, his own advice, which Johnny had followed in marrying Ursula.

Agatha had warned him, another tiresome thought. Ancient conversations with his wife had haunted him lately. Agatha had implied, in clever phrases that recurred to him, that marriage before nature is ripe for it is not the way to 'settle' an unsettled youth, the contrary. She glorified marriage, of course : all women did. It is their specific, their talisman,—never a thing to be lightly undertaken, better any risk than that. Not a duty above all, for anybody on earth,—that was Agatha's line, the contention her husband's family so easily overruled.

For the alternative risk, in her son's case, was great, as she must have known. His disposition, at that critical turning-point of his youth, threatened the future, in more ways than one. Even at that age, Johnny's perspicacity, in the matter of the women who fawned on him, was tremendous, startling to his father's self at times,—his wilfulness and wildness, even among his chosen courts, was a by-word,—and it could be easily argued he would never settle, if he did not settle then, while the family still had him in hand.

It had been so argued, and here was the result,—not bad, all told. He spoke of his wife familiarly, even with a kind of justice,—without fixed prejudice, anyhow. On certain lines he respected her, John was sure. Whether the essential lines—but what are the essential lines, with women, after all ?

At about this point in his meditations, he became aware that it was not a book his son was holding. What he had

taken from the writing-table was a portrait, and during the long silence, believing himself unobserved, he had been studying it minutely.

'How did you get that?' he broke silence at last, becoming conscious of his father's eyes upon him.

'What's that?—little Rosalind? She sent it me, some time since. . . . Flattered a bit, don't you think?' he ventured presently.

'No,' said Johnny.

It was on the tip of Mr. Ingestre's tongue to pursue—'Have you heard she's engaged?'—but he did not say it. He still could not,—less than ever. His own lack of spirit to tease the boy really surprised himself. There was no occasion for such squeamishness. Had he made a fuss, it might have come easier: seeing the portrait in his hands, his father was quite prepared for a rash outbreak: to see him claim it, cast it from him, tear it, trample it, anything. He did nothing at all but gaze in silence, holding it high, rather close to him, in the fine pose the critic had noticed first.

'It's jolly good,' he said, laying it carefully down again, when he had finished his inspection. 'I think I'm going up, now, father,—good-night.'

Mr. Ingestre's pleasant peace was quite shattered, by this untoward incident. He wished to goodness he had never left the confounded thing about. It might even be called inconsiderate, granted the boy's state, had he guessed it. But who could guess? He had taken his mother's word too hastily that all was well, decently well at least, and nothing doing. But now—broken! Broken utterly, and by a girl of nineteen! Johnny's indifference to making himself ridiculous, that was the worst sign. His father knew well, in his own experience, the worth of that as a symptom. Mr. Ingestre got up from his comfortable chair, when his son had gone, and limped round the study, and tossed things about, and ejaculated to empty walls, and felt the want of his wife, most bitterly.

'He's been hanging things on the trees up there,' said John to the shade of Agatha, resentfully. 'Bad as the fellow in the play, what's-his-name with the scrolls,—Orlando. Forget if there are any trees at Routhwick, perhaps there aren't, but he'll do as bad. I tell you he will : he's got it in him. That's not my side of the family, you know,' he pursued to Agatha's shade, 'it's yours. You're responsible,—so you can get him out of it.'

Then he stopped. Agatha's tact and wisdom would never get him out of difficulties again. It struck him in the face, that thought. He sank into his chair again, and forgot Johnny.

IV

Ursula's lie found its mark next day. When or how John learnt of the published engagement, nobody knew, except that his relations noticed a difference in him about midday. He eyed the said relations like enemies when he met them, and even that hardened warrior, his grandmother, dared not address a word to him at the lunch-table. He looked at once furtive and ferocious, like a creature caged,—just the look he had had, his father remembered, once before in history, when baulked of his fixed desire. He seemed then, and seemed now, to be crouching under compulsion, watching any chance to spring clear, and follow the course, the one possible course, on which his lowering eyes were set. He was not at all, for his natural authorities, an encouraging spectacle, and they did not look at him more than necessary. They shunted the burden of him on to the doctor, who was inclined in any case to retain him on the upper floor.

During that day and most of the next, he had to bear it, since his mother had her periods of comparative ease, and asked for him invariably. Tied to home, he devoured his heart in silence. Then, at the first chance,—woe on Ursula had she known—he went straight to Violet.

It was after eleven o'clock at night, an unheard-of hour for calling, but that was nothing in his mood. He sent in his card with two words scrawled on it,—‘three minutes,’ were the words,—and she admitted him. She knew of course she had to, he could not suppose she would refuse ; yet, still observant of all forms, he entered quietly, mastering himself in deference to her state. So would John's wild ancestors have deferred to woman, no doubt, on this occasion only : in his black modern garb he merely followed an ancient rule.

She was in occupation of her husband's room, and in his chair, doing nothing for a wonder,—possibly waiting for him : alone, that was the chief thing, all Johnny asked. He crossed the room and kneeling by her, laid the printed slip before her eyes, while his own eyes asked mutely, ‘Is it true ?’

She read through the slip with her brows rising. Then she looked at him. She had expected some change when they met, something to match the change she had found in Helena, that unforgettable evening : but she was hardly prepared for what she saw. He was quite different,—nothing she had ever known.

‘I can't say,’ she answered his mute appeal. ‘She has not written to me, and I have seen nobody for weeks. It must be true, I suppose. I am astonished, John.’

‘You don't know it to be false,’ he demanded.

‘I feel,’ said Violet, ‘as if it is. She has mentioned that young man to me, but not like that.’ She covered her eyes.

‘I'll go,—you're tired,’ said Johnny, resigned.

‘I'm not,—I'm thinking.’ She dropped her hand and turned the slip over. ‘Which paper ?—it is out of season, of course. Mistakes occur.’ She read through the notice, very carefully. ‘Isn't it usual to give the full name ? Helena Frances is her name, she told me once.’

‘Who draws up the notice ?’ said Johnny.

‘The girl's people, as a rule.’

'Sure?' He pressed her keenly. 'Our side did mine, I'm positive.'

'Aren't you apt to be exceptional? I did my own,' said Violet. 'Everything the girl's mother should do, I did.'

'Have you a second name?'

'Yes, John, I have yours. And I put it into my announcement under direction. I'd back Father for formalities against anyone in London. The full name is certainly usual.'

'You're an angel,' said Johnny, his strained face clearing slightly. 'Then you think it might be a fake?—but whose?'

'It's wild to assume it's a fake on that evidence,' she said. 'If Helena's father wrote it, he might forget she had a second name. Or they might want to drop it, for some reason. That is simply support to the evidence—internal—that I have.'

'I shall go on to the office,' declared Johnny, snatching the slip. There was a pause, while he still knelt at her side.

'Are you sure you had better?' she said gently. 'To question such a thing is unusual—and you are conspicuous, John.'

'Curse it!' he said low. 'All right, I'll leave it. They all combine to torture me. You're a little angel, all the same.' He held her wrist a minute, as though he knew he should go, and could not. 'Three minutes is up,' he remarked, and still waited, biting his lip.

'No hope?' said Violet.

'Mother? Oh, none whatever, but that it'll finish soon.' He gazed about her, still with that look of a thing entrapped. 'I'm mad, with this life. I shall go mad,' he asseverated. 'I tell you, if they're driving her into this, they can look to themselves. She shan't be coerced——'

'You mean, you prefer to coerce her.'

'I don't. It's not necessary. I tell you it's not! She'd come of her own accord, if I made a sign. She loves me, Violet.'

'I know.'

'You do?—Of course you know!' The radiance crossed his face, all the same, to hear it spoken. He had clutched, and was hurting, her hand. 'And perhaps you know I love her? Well then—she'd come to me,—I'd die for her,—what more's there to say?'

'Nothing, for me.'

'Cause you're tired?' he asked, searching her swiftly. 'No, no,—I see,—'cause you've got it all. Well, haven't you?' She nodded, shrinking almost. 'You've too much,' he triumphed, 'you know it,—more than your share. Very well, give me mine. You know what I want, it's not so unusual. Put it into words, since that's your line. Let's hear a good woman tell the truth for once,—stead of quoting!'

'You've a right to your share,' she said faintly. 'Like Charles,—like any man,—of course you have.'

'Good, then,—you give me leave.' His whole powerful will was concentrated on her, driving her to speak the thing he wished.

'What's my leave?' she flashed, at bay. 'John, I can't argue, can't you see? If you come to me now, in that name, I can only say one thing.'

'Pass me,—hey?' She nodded.

'Shocking!' he jibed mechanically: but he was caught, as his subsequent silence proved. Her simple concurrence reached him more easily than any argument, since he was in a mood to rout argument, to relish routing it. Instead of that, he found her at his side. Johnny was not certain he approved of it, but it soothed him to be supported simultaneously, so his feelings were mixed. He allowed her to lean back in her chair, and waited, absorbing her peace.

'It's so terrible,' she murmured presently. 'She was so young, as young as my Margery when they played together. And then—that night you had seized her, John. I can't forget.'

'No,' he assented. 'It scared you too.' Diverting his

eyes, he dwelt on his own memories. He had worn his memories to rags by dwelling on them, fruitlessly.

'But that means,' he said, with a flash of prevision, 'she could get over it, grow through it,—doesn't it? Doesn't it, Violet? Youth means that.'

'She will never forget,' said Violet.

'Think not?' he said, half eager, half mocking. 'You know, it's deuced odd,—I can't remember what I said. Generally, I could make 'em remember, at least, but—Odd little things women are! I can't follow the way they think. . . . And as for argument,' said Johnny pensively, —'futile!'

'Futile,' she echoed voicelessly. His face changed.

'Don't, my dearest girl,' he said, sudden and low. 'I've no right to rag you, and at such an unholy hour. Not your fault anyhow,—no, it isn't, you shut up! You're not as important as all that comes to,—never were. Nice of you to see me, of course,—so on.' She laughed at the characteristic apology: and Johnny, pleased with her laughter, reflected it in a gleam.

'You were told to keep out the pack of us, weren't you?—bet you were! Bad for you to have raging beasts about the place.'

'You're not,' she protested. 'Don't call yourself names, John. I believe you're considering,—taking into consideration,—even now.'

'I don't want to,' he assured her. 'It must be Mother's fault,—oh, Lord!'

He remembered his duties again, groaned, and rose. He had been crouching at her side throughout the interview. 'I didn't come for advice, anyhow,' he remarked, as soon as he was on his feet.

'Well, you haven't got it, have you? Nothing worth coming for, anyhow.'

'I never regard kids' opinions,' said Johnny.

'Oh, no,—I hoped you never did.'

He still did not laugh, though he waited beside her an

instant longer. 'I never knew anyone just like you,' he said. 'Except my mother,—you're her kind.'

With that, he kissed the little hand he had half crushed in his bitter debating, and went, sudden and swift, about his business. It was a fact he had come more to think in her society, than to take advice. He just registered a note in passing of her attitude to Helena, as of his mother's towards Ursula in a former interview. The claims of youth, a plea for the thing unmade, that was the only platform Violet stood upon, and who with better right? That aspect of things,—her aspect,—had risen quite unbidden in Johnny's mind as he knelt beside her, risen to fade again, but it had been there. He absorbed it in his fashion from the fact of her, her surroundings, and her situation: as for any words she used, they slipped away.

Except, indeed, in the practical matter of the printed announcement. Her comment on that was worth storing word for word, since it gave Johnny a loophole, made life worth pursuing till the following day, when Helena's little letter was handed to him, and glorified a passing hour with its healing ray of truth.

Helena little knew how he needed her prayers that day, for his mother's condition was terrible, and hardest, of course, upon him. The day following that again, the printed lie was formally contradicted in the morning news, with an editor's apology that caught attention by its somewhat cutting style. Tempers, the casual reader would surmise, had been lost over that paragraph, possibly between an accomplished editor, and an irate retired Army Captain visiting his private room.

That same morning, Johnny found himself, to his immense relief, in a train, travelling back to Routhwick. How it came about he was hardly aware: except that the great doctor with the gentle manners had suddenly put his foot down. He could do no more good, said Sir

Claude, and he was doing himself harm. He had better go back to his natural occupations in the north. Mr. Ingestre grumbled, but learning that his wife herself had expressed the wish, had to give way. He conveyed that, generally speaking, he did not see the use of Johnny, and said various entirely true things about him, his wife, and his methods of living, to his face. Johnny for once did not answer, he was too tired. Sir Claude answered for him, effectively, when he had left the room.

Johnny, having all the newspapers in the train, a store of cigarettes, and plenteous leisure during his long journey, not to mention a calm of mind, owing to Helena, Violet, and so forth, that he had not enjoyed for days, took the editorial paragraphs in the 'Post' very carefully to pieces, and drew his own conclusions from them: to wit, that neither of those irate gentlemen had found a scapegoat: which was as much as to say that the fake, with the exception of that one slip Violet had noticed, had been uncommonly well done.

Very good. It was 'one to the kid,' and he might or might not let her know it. He would see. It was clear that some young rotter had faked old Falkland's signature,—or Mrs. Falkland's, was it?—which did Violet say? Johnny's eyebrows went up at this point, and then down again. He had an idea.

He lit a second cigarette, dropped all the papers about the floor, and collapsed in a comfortable attitude, his chin on his bent arm against the window, and his eyes on the fleeting country beyond the train. It was hideous blackened country for the most part, so Johnny did not look at it, he looked within. He looked at all kinds of things, casually, since he wanted to enjoy his smoke as well. Then, just for the joke of it, he began to put them together. Certainly, it hooked together nicely rather, when you came to try: that defective notice, the irate denial, Violet's useful remarks concerning mothers, and his own more

useful observations concerning wives. Wives in general, —Johnny's wife. Curious! Most quaint.

He lit a third cigarette, with an air of business, and retracked his whole acquaintance with Ursula, which had not been an unpleasant one, exclusively, to judge by his face. His face,—which reflected all his thoughts, whether people were there to look at him or not,—contained some pleasing memories. But still, he felt surprised. It was, so to speak, out of order. But it had its share of entertainment too. Johnny might be wrong, of course,—he had been, once or twice in his career,—but certainly, it looked as if she cared. A little, let us say,—she cared a bit,—not quite such a stone wall as she seemed. A mad caprice like that,—a nice, respectable, well-bred girl——

Johnny's expression grew pensive,—what the novelists call wistful,—beautiful, indeed. It was a pity that, and his easeful attitude, were entirely thrown away on the only other occupant of the railway-carriage, a venerable gentleman in the further corner, reading the 'Church Times.' At his fourth cigarette, this gentleman gave him a reproachful glance,—professionally reproachful,—and opened, with a jerk, and his lips set clerically, the other window. Johnny drawled—'Thanks,'—to this manœuvre, and put him out. He could not stand people with mouths like that. Then he relapsed into his leisurely thoughts again. The country was getting cleaner, the fields less tired, the water more lively, so that captured some of them, naturally. The heavy nightmare he had left behind him retarded a few more. But what remained were placid, and not without a consoling quality.

' "As it was in the beginning," ' he concluded. ' They're all the same.'

He concluded it, by an oversight, aloud. A sudden rustle reminded him of the venerable party in the corner, who had turned and was glaring at him. Johnny, who had not noticed till that minute that he wore black gaiters, apologised for the quotation. He said it

was odd how tags of things, like that, stuck in one's head.

After the Archdeacon, or whatever he was, had got out,—he got out at the next station,—Johnny did not look to see whether he got in again, further down the train,—Mr. Ingestre turned to business, and wrote a letter which had been delayed, the letter to young Auberon, The last day or two he had not wanted to think about young Auberon, naturally : now that Helena had acquitted him, Johnny could turn his thoughts that way again. It was time, full time, to make a move in the matter of the Hope miniature, it was not a thing which, however his father might rag him, he could really afford to let slide. He had spent another difficult hour the preceding day in manipulating Miss Darcy, and had decided nothing more could be done with her. Nor need to be done, thought Johnny, since she had let drop a fact which practically fixed the blame upon the girl.

The letter he wrote to Quentin in the train was exceedingly clever,—smart, like all his business dealings, condensed and curt. He put the case as he saw it, and asked Quentin, as a favour, to deal with it if he could. He did not want, he said, to prosecute anybody if it could be avoided, or at any rate until he must. He was courteous, but quite firm. He said Quentin would recognise the gravity of the situation, in the value of the article.

That was exactly the thing of which Quentin, receiving the letter, had not had the least idea : and it was the thing which, grave official as he was, made it imperative he should act at once. He had imagined, of course, that poor Miss Darcy, in her agitation and anxiety, had magnified the trinket's importance, and her fault in one : but he now recognised she had not done so. It appeared the thing had been valued by experts once or twice, when the French, or legitimate connections of the little pink-robed Maréchale had made the marauding Ingestres offers for the picture.

The prices put upon it differed according to the fashion and the date, but they were all so high as to make the notion of a crime, in connection with it, more probable on the instant. Obviously, as Ingestre said, it was a serious thing.

Likewise Quentin admitted, since Ingestre was the sufferer to that extent by the loss, he had a perfect right of dictating methods for the thing's recovery. Much as he himself detested the business, little time as he had to engage in it, he could not complain at being employed. It was even considerate, from their point of view, to employ him. He thought once of his aunt,—consulting her anyhow,—but decided against it. Ingestre had appealed, in confidence, to him.

Likewise he could not but see the direct pointing of the evidence, just as Johnny did : and above all that of the last most damaging little fact he had collected from Miss Darcy. This was simply that the drawer in which Jill had been seen to place the miniature, and which she had appeared to lock, had been found unlocked the day Miss Darcy discovered the treasure's disappearance. It was a very black little fact, for it suggested foresight, and the habit of cunning and concealment, such as might well have been derived from Jill's parentage. She could not take it at the time, but she prepared the way for taking it later, when her benefactress's eyes were off her. It was bad, certainly ; almost as bad as it could be ; Ingestre was right.

As for Miss Darcy's self, Johnny's little plea to exonerate her, though short, was eloquent : and Quentin, who had had the same ideas about her, more vaguely, felt it the more. He liked all the letter, but he liked that part the best, it matched his own sentiments so precisely. Johnny knew the bearded one, so he pleasantly declared, better than she did herself : since obviously she conceived herself, in her present state, capable of any folly or forgetfulness. She could not possibly be fraudulent, he said, and

was most unlikely to be negligent, in those matters which had been the chief interest of her life. Her collection was her hobby,—a spinster's hobby,—which, otherwise stated, meant the thing round which the best of her brain revolved,—the thing which a family would have been in happier circumstances. Instead of beastly lap-dogs, said Johnny, she had beautiful knick-knacks, enamels and paintings, that was all. She would sooner have died than either assume possession in secret of a thing that was not hers, or leave the said thing, unguarded, in an open drawer. Even if her reason was tottering,—which it was not,—habit, life-long habit, would have been too much for her there.

'Granted,' said Quentin, after an instant's reflection: and he, like Johnny, set the 'bearded one' aside. Well then——

He met Jill in the square garden, of which Miss Darcy had a key. He summoned her there by letter, preferring that Miss Darcy, who still upheld the girl's innocence, should not know. Jill might ask for the key after dinner, he suggested, to have a little walk. That such a proposal on his part would be likely to raise Jill's poor little hopes to the skies, he never reflected, his mind being set on far more serious things. That her mind was set, in advance, on him, was, to say the least of it, inessential. It was also foolish, extremely silly at her age. It was a hot summer evening when this—to her—delightful clandestine meeting took place. She met him just without the garden, and let him into it, with charming, childish importance. Even to him, she seemed younger than usual that evening,—pretty and gay.

There were still two ways of it possible to his mind, of course: that Jill had taken the thing for her own purposes, to raise money upon, for her amusement, or even in a spirit of passing spite to tease Miss Darcy: and that she had been used as a cat's-paw by her father. Ingestre in his letter guessed the latter, not knowing the girl at

all, only knowing of her circumstances, from his wife. Consequently, Quentin began upon his old tack of investigation, duty-bound.

But no: she denied all knowledge of, sight of, or communication with, her father. She put herself right, instantly and eagerly, in Quentin's eyes, so as to begin that pleasant stroll together in the twilight on the best of terms. Jill often wondered why Mr. Auberon was so curious about her father, when she disliked him so,—disliked him increasingly,—wanted to finish with him altogether. However, she gave in to that little fad of his, and assured him that she had long been at liberty, utterly undisturbed. Her father, most probably, was out of London. He might be at the end of Europe, for her.

Then he told her about Ingestre's treasure,—he called it a 'little picture,'—and the history of the loss by easy stages. He could not put the case complete, for the relief of his own mind, because she interrupted him.

'The dark one who speaks so well?' said Jill, of Johnny. 'I don't like him much,' she added reassuringly. 'But *she* is always better the days he comes.'

Quentin, ignoring this sort of thing, proceeded.

'Lost?' said Jill.

'Well, disappeared. Miss Darcy can't find it.'

'Miss Darcy?' cried Jill. 'She cannot look for things,—she cannot move about.' Her violence increased of a sudden. 'She is an old, silly, ugly thing. Pulling drawers open, and shutting them, and talking to herself. As if I had not seen her. Of course she has put it somewhere.'

'Ingestre looked as well,' observed Quentin.

'Men!' said Jill, with exquisite contempt. 'They cannot find things. When he loses things at home, his wife looks for him. *He* sits in a chair.'

Quentin looked in front of him, trying not to be amused. She certainly knew Ingestre, for he had seen the very thing she described take place.

'Then I suppose,' he said, 'it's useless to mention that I looked too.'

'You? You looked for her? When?'

'Some time ago.'

'Some time? And you did not ask me to look?'

'She did not want to worry you.'

'Old fool,' said Jill. After this ungrateful remark she waited a little. Her aspect, her colour had visibly changed, he noticed.

'Of course, then, she has dropped it in the street,' said Jill. 'Her hand shakes,—you have seen it.'

'Yes, but she has not dropped it. She had it last in the house.'

He explained about the last appearance of the precious packet, and then the little matter of the open drawer. He was extremely clear, and as kind as he could manage. He tried to believe in her still, he really wanted to,—only, she had not enquired yet what the thing that was lost was like. Surely that was the natural question, since it had been wrapped in paper when she handled it. Quentin had called it 'a little picture' simply. The alert policeman in him could not be overcome, and, owing to her soft manner, it obtained every moment more ascendancy.

'I suppose,' he said, as easily as he could, 'nobody likely to tamper with such a thing could have been in the front room?'

'Mr. Ingestre,' said Jill, on the instant. 'Extremely likely. He would take it away one day, and then he would come back to frighten her. He would frighten her rather well. And she would shake all over, and her eyes stick out. That would be amusing for him. He finds everything in the world amusing,—me as well.'

'Ingestre doesn't laugh at you,' said Quentin, 'come!'

'He does. He laughs at my leg. He is very amused, the way I walk about. He brings that woman flowers,—he never brings flowers to me. I am better than she is, prettier, but he does not think of me, I am a servant. He

hates me, because I acted better than him. I did, he cannot forget it. He looks at me in that fashion, because of that.'

Quentin, impatient of her egoism, did not reply. This was her way, either to appear exaggeratedly conscious of her lameness, or else obstinately to disregard it. Either method vexed his straightforward mind. Why not admit her disadvantage simply, and accept the sympathy and help they were all ready to offer?

Silence, in the summer dusk, fell between them. What Jill's thoughts were, he could not gather, it was getting too dark to study her face. She was panting a little, he noticed, with the effort of her last rapid speech. As for her eyes, they were fixed across the garden,—there was another couple strolling in the distance, and she might have been observing those.

'It would surprise you very much if I found the picture?' she queried at last, sweetly, and curling round his arm.

'No,' said Quentin, troubled at once. 'I hope you will.'

'You hope it? Really? Well, listen. I will look,—and find. . . . Perhaps I will find. Do you hear?'

'Very good,' said Quentin, still troubled. Why would she not be straight?

'And when I—shall have found, you will thank me. Yes?'

'We all shall,' he said.

'You,' said Jill. Silence. 'You are content?' she asked.

'Nearly.' The policeman bit his lip.

'What else? Tell me.'

'Well, I had better describe the thing to you, hadn't I? Before you look for it.'

'Describe?'

'It was wrapped up, of course, when you put it away.'

'Good,' said Jill. 'Yes, it was wrapped up all nicely, with a little string. And it will be wrapped up when I find it, when I bring it to you, just the same. Be sure of that.' She dropped his arm.

'Then I need not tell you any more.' He stopped short, facing her, looking her in the eyes.

'No,' she said softly, looking back with her strange seductive smile, her strange unfixed gaze, that seemed hardly to see him. 'I shall not trouble you,—you have no need.'

Confession, was it not? More than that, she flattered his one weakness, his weakness for government, for influence. She would return that beautiful thing that had been taken in a moment of mischief or covetousness,—very natural, in the little poverty-stricken artist that she was,—for his sake. That is, owing to his power of persuasion and his skilful handling. She promised it.

And that indeed was Jill's intention, as she hastened, gracefully limping, back to the house.

V

Though John said little to Ursula on his return to Routhwick, she gathered that in the self-imposed penance she was undergoing there, she had small prospect of immediate release. He had parted with his mother, he told her shortly: but from other sources of information in the family letters, Ursula learnt that, though Agatha was dead to all intents and purposes, the news of her last breath might still be months ahead. Thus John could go about his duties with a free mind, or at least unhampered by suspense; and John's wife could still postpone her mourning, and amuse herself, within reason, as she would.

Not that she wished for society, she explained to John. To fill Routhwick was difficult at any time, it was so enormous and unwieldy; to fill it with an ordinary house-party, at such a moment, would be in exceptionally bad taste; not to mention that it was, in her view, a dreary place, suited to students and sportsmen, perhaps, but useless for the ordinary social purposes. Ursula hated Routhwick, with its bare stone front and large cold rooms, and a mere pretence at grounds or garden, close under the moors, and raked in consequence by all the winds that

there disported. It was ugly, to her view, at least as compared with the suavities of the south-country Hall : and John, of course, was making it as dull for her as possible, —that was his way of conveying to her that she should never have come at all. At times she regretted the step, as his father had prophesied ; at others, it became anew clear to her consciousness that her duty was to watch over him, ignore so far as was possible his marked ingratitude, and recall him by her patient presence and strict attention to his comfort to his family obligations.

Unfortunately Johnny allowed her little opportunity of comforting him. He resumed exactly the life he had been leading before he went to London : rose early by choice, and was to and fro all day, transacting visits of business or diplomacy in every corner of the large estate. The keepers, the farmers, and Mr. Fox, a vulgar man whom Ursula could hardly tolerate, had most of his society. Though she rode well herself and shot fairly, John never even suggested she should accompany them : and often seemed to forget her existence for days together, picking up meals in the country round from anyone who offered them, and not appearing at home till nightfall, too tired and drunk with the keen air to do more than fall asleep in his chair. Every day he seemed to get handsomer and browner and bolder, and to attend to her less : younger too, alas,—she was feeling the difference in their true ages now ; among the old farmers and servitors, the weather-beaten men of the dales, he looked a boy ; and was treated—being Master Johnny at Routhwick—by one and all as such.

As for her shot at him in the dark, she could not say if it had reached him even, wounded him still less. She could follow his thoughts now less than she had ever done. Nothing in his demeanour seemed altered, unless that he appeared, if anything, a trifle more pleased with himself than before. Ursula would have feared he had missed the report and consequent gossip about the engagement altogether,—but that it was inconceivable, considering that

he had been in his grandmother's company. None of the family, at least, would let him off, and old Mrs. Ingestre's letters were full of allusions to the amusing stir created, at the height of the slack season, by the false report. Its effects elsewhere had been undoubted, and that he alone could have escaped was unlikely. No, it was probably nothing but obstinacy and pride. He was as vain as ever : and, being a man, he was also busy,—and well.

Ursula was neither. She was fagged and she was bored, and he would not amuse her. He talked to her at times, of course, since he was not a person to be silent ; he aired his own thoughts in her company, and attended little to her replies. She might have been anybody or nobody, for all the real attention he gave her : and he looked at her like the furniture, with no appearance of taking her in. His odd times, and the more desperately rainy days, he spent over music, in which again he did not choose to let her share ; and in what she supposed was his writing or editing, conducted in strict privacy in a small log-house or *châlet* that he owned, in the wood beyond the garden.

This little 'Lyke-wood,' as the old residents called it, was a mere thicket, and shut in the so-called garden to one side. It was not the least pretty, merely serviceable for protection, its component trees misshapen, lichen-covered, straining and strident with that eternal moorland breeze. Words cannot say how weary Ursula grew of that sound by night and day ; yet John seemed to love it, listened to it willingly like the gypsy he was. Men, Ursula told herself often, have no nerves.

It was down in this little camp of his that she informed John one morning that she meant to intermit her virtuous abjuration of all society.

'Can I come in ?' she said, just tapping the door.

'I suppose so,' said Johnny politely. He looked at her as she entered. It was a wet day, as usual,—the weather had been bad since his return,—but she was admirably clad as always, and the water-drops on her rough clothes,

the slight crust of mud on her strong shoes, were by no means unsuitable attributes. He knew she had not been well, but she never looked otherwise than trim and shapely, though her eyes were slightly strained, he noted, and her lips a little pale. Ursula always said she was all right when he asked her, but he knew pretty well, by this time, when she was not. For all that, a dozen men of his acquaintance would have called her a fine girl, and a wife to be proud of. He only felt he could have welcomed, at that moment, any woman in the world who looked a little different.

'Am I interrupting you?' asked Ursula, glancing at his papers, which were freely strewn about the table. John was oddly shy about his writing, and she did not often disturb him. However, he appeared in a fairly good temper, so she supposed things had been going well.

'When Byron's wife asked that,' said Johnny, still scrawling something, 'he said "damnably."'

'I see,—so you won't.'

Ursula smiled faintly, turning to the fire, a tiny brasier, quite adequate for the small room. It was a remarkably pleasant little place, Johnny's log-house, though completely simple. It had the air of a settler's shanty in the backwoods, or something even more primitive still: not without reason, since it belonged to the period of his youth when books of adventure held the foremost place. It was strictly his own property,—his mother had planned and presented it to him when he was still a schoolboy, so of course it suited him. Her portrait was over his table, a portrait dating back to that period, long before Ursula's reign. The log-house had nothing to do with Ursula, so she was naturally critical. She tried the dust on the shelf above the hearth with a finger while she was speaking, and whisked a little of it off, discontentedly. It was so hopeless to keep him clean. Johnny watched her with a suspicious eye. It was his dust, and she had no business to meddle with it.

'My works aren't quite up to Byron's,' he told her. 'So I understand from my publisher.'

'How modest.' Mrs. Ingestre put her hand to her neck of a sudden, with a frown Johnny knew. It meant neuralgia—he believed: she had never directly told him so. 'How can you live in these draughts?' she murmured, turning about to search the walls. 'Why on earth don't you have those holes stopped up?'

Johnny's eyes followed hers to one or two nicely-cut round holes in the log-house walls. He speculated on them a minute, his eyes widening gravely. They were not very far up the wall,—they had once been as high as his shoulders, they were now about as high as his waist. The furious west wind, not to mention the furious western rain, was chasing and flurrying and dripping through them. It did make the log-house a little draughty, as Ursula said.

'Sorry,' he said, 'but I couldn't possibly. I might want 'em, any time. Stop 'em up, indeed,—I like that! They're loopholes.'

'Loopholes?' said Ursula, perfectly vague. 'What for?'

'Rifles, of course. What d'you suppose?' Johnny tilted his chair on to its back-legs, still speculating on his surroundings. 'It was the Indians, that night, I think,—or Silver's gang,—Silver, probably. But you never know who mayn't attack a place like this,—have to be ready for anything,—jolly well prepared.' He glanced at the ceiling, not so far above his head. 'Luckily our defences were in order, thanks to the Captain. We've held it so far. Only one of ours was found stretched by his loophole, a bullet through his heart. One of the best of 'em, too,—the quiet one. What was his name?' He turned on his wife.

'How should I know?' said Ursula, without a smile.

'You ought to. He was the valet,—body-servant,—something like Blandy he was. Blandy would behave like that at a pinch,—offer his life for mine. . . . I'd let him know if he didn't,' added Johnny.

'What a baby you are, John,' said Ursula after a pause. 'Talking such nonsense.'

'I'm not,—it's the classics. Not at all stuff for babes,

either,—you go and look it up. Do you a lot of good, that yarn would. Just the thing for you. Can you load a gun?'

'You know I can,' said Ursula.

'That's not the proper answer,' said Johnny, annoyed. 'You're a woman, ain't you?—you look it. Very well, your answer is—'No, alas, show me how,'—something like that. Good Lord,' said Johnny, moved, 'why, Violet would have known how to answer, better than that!'

'Violet can't load a gun,' said Ursula.

'Well, Barbara,' said Johnny artlessly. 'Janie Clewer,—any of them. You don't seem to know the simplest things.' He swung his chair back upon its four legs again. 'Very good, then don't come and disturb me—er—Byronically in the log-house. It isn't the place for you, and it isn't done. You're nothing but a feminine female,—you go home.' He recurred to his papers, contentedly.

Mrs. Ingestre did not go home. She looked down at the brasier for a time,—she was drying her feet, her nice strong shoe on the fender. Ursula always found her feet consoling, they were so well-made: and her neuralgia was feeling better for the warmth. It had been furious, at intervals, during the morning, but she had done everything she should do, all the same, and kept her temper, so nobody had guessed she was not completely well. She let John at the table settle into something like reasonable sense again,—call it his right mind. He was toying with the leaves of his manuscript now, smiling at something,—one of his own jokes, probably. He was forgetting all about her, rapidly: and she must speak, if she meant to, soon.

'John,' she said, 'I've been thinking. I've no reason to refuse people who absolutely ask to come here, have I? We're not in mourning yet.'

'We're not in mourning officially,' said Johnny.

'If you object, I'd rather you said so,' said Ursula. 'I can get out of it quite easily. It's only Mrs. Falkland—and one night.'

There was a pause, as she expected. He had lifted his head at the name.

'I can do with Mrs. Falkland, for one night,' he said slowly. 'But I thought you said she was abroad.'

'So she is, or she would not have offered it probably. She can't have heard the latest news about your mother. As it is, she begs me not to let them disturb me.'

Another pause, while the pronouns sank in. 'Them?' said Johnny. 'Is the husband coming too?'

'No. It's not the parents at all. It's for the sake of those children,—the walking-party. They are not far off, and the weather's been so bad,—inns and so on, I quite understand it. Her getting worried about them, I mean,—the least I could do——'

She stopped, for John's eyes were turned upon her, and she could not go on.

'The least you could do is to offer to take the children here for a night. Considering your old friendship with the various parents. Is that it?'

'If you object, I won't,' said Ursula. Her utterance failed, fell dead. Johnny could still fight through his eyes, and was doing so, ruthlessly. 'They may refuse, of course——' she pushed on.

'They will not refuse,' said Johnny. He flicked over three leaves of his manuscript,—like a sword-flash, that movement was. 'Very well.'

That was like him, to accept the challenge,—take up the gage,—only she had not expected it. She had very nearly counted on his refusing point-blank; especially since he had plenteous excuse for the moment, and since she took him by surprise. But not he. . . . Now the die was cast. She would have now to realise at leisure all the risk she was running in so daring him,—daring him to do his worst. It was valiant, in the peculiar style of Ursula's dull courage: valiant in the effort it cost her, that is, but incompletely weighed. She reckoned without him, the unknown quantity that he really was to her. She might regret it later. All too probably she would.

And it is notable that John, furious as he was at the

trick, admired her. It was abominable, but fine in its way, it really was. Her pose, her imposture, was still held sublimely : he was still to think she knew nothing of his faithlessness, or at least, that she did not care. Vain as he was, he had another pang of questioning whether she did care really, whether her attitude towards him was not simply mocking and cynical. It would have been so in another woman, any other,—not in her. She was capable of nothing so obvious and so direct as that.

He laughed, when she had left the log-house, and remained for some time, his head in his hands. Then he said, ' Lord, she's done me,' and laughed again. To be ' done,' and by such simple means ! What it is in life to have to do with fools,—obstinate fools. Of course she had not begun to guess what he had gone through, was going through daily, or she could not, in mercy—Helena there ! The sublime cheek of the conception,—the glorious idea ! There, at Routhwick : after knocking about with that rough-haired pair on the hills, sleeping at inns, eating what came, to take her in, dry her feet, look after her——

Johnny, immensely hospitable, like all his family, looked about him and beyond the window. Ursula called Routhwick an ugly place, perhaps it was : but it was not comfortable—precisely. He could see that she was happy, show her a thing or two,—some things Ursula did not know of, since she never looked. He could have her here in the log-house, on a beastly rainy morning, just like this. He could—what could he not do, having herself, looking in her sweet eyes.

Johnny swore : he uttered a really bad word, and got up. The work on which he was engaged was interesting, but he could not continue to attend to it ; Ursula's intrusion had disturbed him fatally, even in the Byronic measure. He rose and went to the little hearth, where his wife had stood, turning his back upon his mother's picture,—pondering if the strength were in him to withstand a test like this. The ancestor whose records he was exploring would not have

withstood it for a moment,—his own father would hardly have withstood. If Ursula stuck to her present methods, goading him every day till the choice was offered him, he would not answer for the result. As it was, in the daily endeavour to exhaust himself physically and resist all teasing thought, thought returned in a rush at times like this, changing all things in life into one fierce desire, reckless, regardless,—the desire to assert himself, his lordship of life, at anybody's expense. Why not?—he was no better than his ancestors, really: nothing prevented it but a few catchwords of the day,—and even so, his day had other catchwords. If he could forget his generation, forget his social responsibilities, his duty to the future, his obligation from the past, all the subtly-instilled truths of his mother's teaching, for one instant, for one single blissful hour, would not the sacrifice of all the past, all the future, of life itself—of honour itself—be worth it? He shrewdly guessed it would. He was not deceived, at least, as to his own weaknesses. He could forecast his own penance accurately. But hers—

‘MY DARLING,’ wrote Mrs. Falkland,

‘Father seems quite all right, so don't worry about him, if you are really enjoying yourselves, though I am sorry you get so much rain. But I am *distressed* to hear the boys are so inconsiderate, dragging you up at those hours, and then giving you no proper meals all day. Will you tell Harold from me that if he cannot regard poor Quentin, who certainly needs all his sleep, I *insist* on his regarding you. I remember too well the appearance you presented in Switzerland, after the week you went walking with Harold alone. And if serious then, it is simply *fatal* now, when all kinds of people and the best papers want your photographs. Father found another bit about you in the “Chatterer” and said he was enclosing it but of course did not. As if every word they say about you, my jewel, does not matter, but of course he is mooning over golf. ■

‘I think you had better accept this, really very kind,

from Mrs. Ingestre for the last week-end. I was at my wits' end where to give you a little rest and comfort and respectable food, not to say society, but I know she is to be trusted. Quentin knows her already of course, which makes it easier, and Harold ought to because I certainly introduced him. I gather from Mrs. Ingestre that Routhwick is a fine place, their second but the largest. So have your habit sent up and your white silk for evenings, servants and people—I must have you look nice.

'Don't get yourself all thin and burnt before the autumn, my dearest, will you, and do let the others do those dreadful things alone. That evening walk to see the sunset sounded so nice for both of you, but as for Striding Edges I think it can hardly be the thing. Love to my dear boys.

'YOUR OWN MOTHER.'

'What's the Mater saying now?' said Harold, when his sister received the above letter at an inn at Grasmere. Helena had remained gazing at it and the enclosure it held, a little longer than seemed absolutely necessary in the case.

'She thinks I am getting burnt,' said Helena, returning to her duties at the tea-tray.

'Ho, ho!' said Harold. 'What with,—the snow?' During the first week of the walking-tour they had had every conceivable weather except fine weather, which had naturally amused them very much.

'And she thinks we are doing too much,' added Helena. She retained the letter, though Harold, desirous of further diversion, stretched a hand for it.

'Oh, is that all?' he said contemptuously. 'Now suppose we cut the sandwiches.'

¶ Helena, refusing to be hurried in any degree, cut them nicely, and they went out, in the gently falling rain. It was such sweet-smelling, delicate, insinuating rain, that nobody could possibly complain of it, and it looked like clearing later. This constituted in itself a distinct improvement on the day before, so they started in excellent spirits. Helena, having combated vigorously for her rights in being

allowed to carry something, and having failed completely and been snubbed, determined aloud that she would never again join a walking-party where 'they' were two to one. On the contrary, her plan was, next time, to invite a nice strong girl to walk with her,—such as the elder Miss Weyburn, for instance,—and to take Harold.

Harold retorted that he had no objection, but why the elder? The other was——

'To carry your things, dear,' explained Helena. 'Dorothy is not so strong.'

Harold then said, rather hastily, that he thought the plan hard on Auberon.

'Quentin shall come too, if he likes,' said Helena, relenting,—and ruining her position by relenting, like a girl. For the die was cast, and since her confidential exchange with Mr. Auberon, on the subject of their engagement to one another in the columns of the 'Post,' Mr. Auberon as such had ceased to exist. Christian names all round were the rule of that expedition; dating from about the third hour after their meeting at Keswick, the rule had to be firmly made.

Later on, having Harold alone for a short period, she showed him her mother's letter. He had, of course, to be shown it, and it was better, during first discussion, that Quentin should not be there. Quentin had vanished temporarily over the horizon, to discover the way, with the aid of his own special map, which was better than Falkland's. Mr. Falkland and his sister were sitting side by side under a wall,—a very wet wall, with draughty gaps in it,—Mrs. Falkland would have died, had she known. There was a faint gleam of sun,—a reflection of a kind of design, on the sun's part, to come out, if possible, for their benefit later on,—and it lit up a few of Helena's little gold-dust wisps of hair, which the wind had loosened previously. Her eyes were on the point of her stick, in the roadway,—Harold's fixed, in a dreamy rapture, on his boots. It seemed a pity to break his reverie on that

subject, but Helena had to do it. She had been making up her mind to it, for some time past. So she handed him, with a comment, her letter.

Harold looked it over carelessly: he seldom read his mother's letters completely through, and this seemed just in her usual style.

'What the deuce——' he said, his attention riveted half-way.

'I expect we had better go,' said Helena, still looking in front of her. 'It's kind of her, as Mother says.'

Harold, having glanced at her rather anxiously, re-read Ursula's note with care. There was a leisured languor about that note, together with a point-device propriety, which made the civility seem particularly deliberate. Mrs. Ingestre was not being obliged to ask them,—it was her own idea.

Well then,—*he* could not be there, thought Harold. There was no mention of him. He had gone fooling off somewhere on his own, sporting probably, since he was that kind of chap. But in that case, why did Helena look so—well—and why on earth should she want to go?

'I don't understand it,' he said briefly. 'Why should we go? What can she want with the gang of us? There isn't one of us she really knows. Besides——'

'Perhaps she wants Quentin,' said Helena. Her fair brow was strained a little as she watched her stick. She did so hate deceiving Harold,—hated it! Why should fate be so hard?

'Well, I don't suppose for a minute Auberon wants to go,' said Harold. 'No more do I much, to tell the truth.'

'You think I'd better refuse, then?' There was the same alarming languor in her manner that he remembered that night at the ball, an expression as of one entranced or mesmerised by something,—distant music, or memory. In his active sister,—in surroundings such as these,—it was terrible. It reinforced his suspicion, too, that she knew the fellow to be there. The question was on his lips, but he could not ask it. Her dreamy dignity held him up.

'I think you'd better refuse,' he assented gravely after a pause.

'Wouldn't you come with me, if I wanted you?' For one terrible minute, he thought she was going to cry. And she turned her eyes to his, beseeching,—it was not to be borne.

'Oh, of course, if you want, I will,' he said hastily. 'Just as you think best. We needn't bother Auberon to go, that's all. It's only a night she asks us, is it?'

'Two nights,' said Helena.

'Good,' said Harold.

He did not mean it was good, of course,—far from it; but he was toiling inwardly, and coming by degrees to a bold resolution. Could a consultation, a comparison of impressions, on such a tricky question as this, by any means be arranged with Auberon? Harold consulted him about nearly all other problems in life. It was distinctly difficult, but it presented a gleam of possible future light in Harold's gloom,—about as much as the sun was offering to light their day. With luck, and care, it might be done.

Harold and Quentin left Helena on the first or inferior peak to enjoy the view, piled all their food, maps, and encumbrances, and most of their clothing, round her, and climbed the second or superior peak alone. Going up, no man could talk, owing to nature's limitations. On the top, no man could talk, confidences anyhow, because of the wind. The confidences would have been carried into several counties. Besides, as usual on the tops of things, there was another person there, of a kind no one ever wants to meet anywhere, in a checked cap. Coming down, however, by a zigzag path that took things easy among rough gorse and fern, on the side remote from Helena and her lady's peak, and with nothing but a black-faced sheep, at times, to overhear,—which inquisitiveness Harold discouraged with small stones,—he put the Ingestre invitation before Auberon, just by way of preliminary, to get his general ideas.

Auberon's general idea was that he had to be back in town that Saturday night, and couldn't, thanks. He did not even say he was sorry,—perhaps he was not. He did not chop courtesies with Harold.

Harold, looking bothered, said, 'dash, then they had better refuse.'

'Why?' said Quentin. No more.

But there you were,—Harold told him. He hoped he was not betraying his sister's confidence in so doing,—but then, Helena had never confided in him, if you came to that. And really, if any man in the world was safe—— He told him the whole thing rapidly and curtly, with infinite relief, for he had told no one freely yet. With his father, he had had, all the same, to pick and choose, or the good Captain would have stumped off incontinently to call Ingestre out. With Mrs. Shovell, Harold had not spoken out, because the temptation to imply the half, in her company, had been too much for him. Auberon, of course, by one means and another, got it all, not only implied, but stated. He told Harold not to be an ass, and to say what he meant, several times. He ejaculated 'why,' and 'what,' and such simple particles, and glanced over the three or four counties which their situation dominated, with his steely eyes. Eagle's eyes, Helena called them; they had that setting, and high, imperial look.

When Harold's confession was complete, he said nothing at once in commentary, and Harold had a qualm. Of course he knew his prejudices. Suppose he had 'put him off' Helena for good! That would be frightful, really,—he had not thought of that.

'Of course, I know Mrs. Ingestre's all right, it's not that,' he said apologetically, to fill the gap. He had never quite been able to gather Auberon's opinion on Mrs. Ingestre. Quentin had interviewed her, or made use of her in his fashion, several times on different subjects, and called on her politely once or twice. He spoke of her on the business side with approval: but Harold had an idea, all the same, there was something in her he disliked. Her being married, possibly,—that would be quite enough. Perhaps merely an ancient vestige of the sentiment that had led Quentin's father and uncles to besiege Ursula's

father's barn. Blood-feuds, it is true, are a little out of date, but constitutional antipathies undoubtedly remain ; and the Auberons and Thynnes were both the kind of family which reproduces a type, persistently, through the ages.

'And, of course, the invitation's in form,' Harold proceeded, punctuating his remarks with stones, at sheep. 'And Helena wants it safe enough, but there you are ! It's such a weird idea of the woman to want her, if he's there,—and weirder still for the girl to want to go, if he's not,—and the chances are she knows his movements, curse him,—and the Mater of course is blatantly off the whole shoot,—and altogether it's a bit rocky, to my ideas, and I wondered if you——'

'I'd let her go,' said Quentin. 'Why shouldn't she ? D'you mean you don't trust her ?'

Harold was ashamed.

Yes, he thought a lot of Helena, not a doubt of it. How he got there, Harold could not think, for they never went at all deep in their daily conversations. They talked largely about things beneath their eyes, as people do, out walking, and about the morrow's plans, and about the weather,—inevitable and fruitful theme. But they talked as friends talk, who are sure of stable foundations to the sympathy which expressed itself in these superficial ways. It was true Helena was an unusually sensible girl ; and though it was she, quite often, who led the subject, and though they had plenty of common friends, it is probable that the discussions of the trio contained less mere careless and disparaging gossip than that of any other chance grouping of young London people, at that time disporting themselves upon English soil.

Altogether, as time went on, Harold refused to be discouraged, at least as to Auberon's side. He only took good care to avoid the most distant pleasantries as to their being engaged to one another,—precious good care ! There was no point in it, since the thing was obviously working in its

own way. Whoever the inspired idiot was who had forged that paragraph, Harold drank to him silently, every night. He had done excellent mole-work, underground, in Harold's cause. It would never have struck him, himself, to produce a match in just that way, but with a queer fellow like Auberon,—really queer as regarded girls—he might well have had a worse idea. Quite evidently he felt responsible from that moment, for Helena,—and that meant so much, with him. He had to make up to her for something,—what, Harold could not quite see, unless it was for owning his own name. He also looked *at* her a little, not merely towards her. And when it came to looking *at* Helena, well—not to put too fine a point on it, Harold backed the family.

Besides, how could Helena watch Auberon, walk by him, talk to him for three weeks, day after day, and not realise *that* was how a man should be? He would be a connection to be proud of,—to eclipse Thomas utterly, once for all; and Harold hoped his sister Con would be driven, in the happy event of Helena's real engagement, to recognise her own fatal mistake. That is to say, he greatly feared she must do so. He had already, before the three weeks were up, committed himself to telling Con, in a letter, that that amazing bit of impudence in the 'Post,' that had made the governor so rabid, was not, in Harold's opinion, so far ahead of actual truth. What always struck Harold most in Auberon was (he added to Con) his first-rateness, the kind of thing that seasons a man and makes him last. His eyesight (Harold's brother-in-law, it will be remembered, wore eye-glasses) was remarkable, he spotted the most remote objects from the mountain-tops, and his geography was never out. As to his future, the C.B. was, of course, speculation, but the betting was on it, in the next ten years. At least, he would never be one of your arm-chair philosophers, and his present form was tremendous. There was indeed, but a single point in which he could be said to be inferior to Harold's self,—his boots. . . . As for Helena's, they were rotten.

PART V

1702



STRETTO

I

'WHAT does "stretto" mean, John?' said Ursula, one evening.

He was lying in his chair by the fire, in his favourite attitude, full-length, hands locked across his eyes, and she was sitting at the piano. His attitude was one of attention, but Ursula was fairly well convinced that he was not attending to her. He did not attend when she practised, commonly; and if her studies had caused him any annoyance, he would most certainly have said so. At least, one knew where one was, with such as John. Ursula was a good worker by nature, systematic and conscientious, and though she might toil among things she did not fully understand, she toiled well, in a spirit of willing servitude to a god she recognised. Possibly this was why, even though she should repeat a passage twenty times, Johnny bore the noise she made uncomplaining: and was able, at need, to abstract his thoughts completely.

He seemed to have done so now, for he answered absently—

'Stretto's the Italian for strict.'

'Strict? That won't do.' She seemed puzzled.

'In the sense of close,—the opposite of slack. Constricted.' He turned, moved his hands, and took in her attitude, frowning at the page before her. 'Oh, music, is it?' he said.

'It's the end of a fugue,' said Ursula.

'How many characters in the fugue?—parts, I should say. Is it a four-part?'

'I suppose so.' She examined it. 'Yes.'

'Well then, it means that all four characters appear together on the scene at rather closer quarters than they did at the start. Whereupon, naturally, the fun begins. Just as it does in the last act of a good comedy or novel. See?'

'I see,' said Ursula, 'more or less.'

'It's a decent composer's opportunity,' said Johnny. 'Ripping, it must be, chivying 'em into line.'

'Why don't you write fugues, if it's so amusing?' said Ursula.

'Because I can't,' said Johnny simply. 'Anything more?'

'Oh no, you can go to sleep again. It never occurred to me a fugue was like a novel.'

'Didn't it?' said Johnny, surprised. 'Oh, then, perhaps it isn't, and I'm wrong. I was only trying to give you an idea.'

'Oh, I've got the idea, thanks.' She began to play again. 'A fugue's a good deal—tidier than life,' she said through the music indistinctly. 'And novels are meant to be life-like,—that's all.'

'A fugue is tidiness itself,' said Johnny earnestly. 'Blessed order—management—peace. Violet once said it's like a well-spent day.'

'Did she?' Mrs. Ingestre turned. 'I say, that's rather good.'

'Think so?' said Johnny. 'I said it was like the way you spent a day, not like the way that we did.'

'You and she? Dear me, how clever of you. I hope she was flattered.'

'She was, awfully,' said Johnny. 'At being classed with me. I don't suppose she's got over it yet, if you asked her.'

'I don't propose to,' said Ursula. Seeming to tire of the fugue of a sudden, she got out another music-book from the shelf above her head, and Mr. and Mrs. Ingestre resumed their avocations.

Much later in the evening, when John appeared to be really asleep, not pretending, beneath his hands, and Ursula had given up the piano, and recurred to her crochet in the sofa-corner, out of regard for him, a servant came into the room. The Routhwick servants were a stage lower than the Hall servants, in not being so sure of their appropriate demeanour at all contingencies of life. This one, having hesitated and glanced at his master a moment, crossed and spoke to Ursula privately.

'How very extraordinary!' Mrs. Ingestre exclaimed, rising. Then, as her husband started awake,—'John, it's that girl.'

'What girl?' said Johnny crossly. He did not like being roused at all.

'Why, that girl who acted for you,—what was it?—Celia. The one I sent to Miss Darcy, and Mr. Auberon knew about. You can't have forgotten,' she added sharply, 'so don't pretend to. She acted rather well.'

Johnny had the appearance of having forgotten because he was gazing at Ursula blankly, his dark eyes rather distended. He looked dazed.

'Stretto!' he suddenly ejaculated.

'What do you mean?' said Ursula, deeply vexed at such behaviour before the servant.

'Who did she ask for?' said Johnny sharply to the servant.

'You, sir,' said the man. 'But seeing you were asleep——'

Ursula frowned. 'I'll go,' she said quietly, and was moving.

'Indeed you won't,' jerked Johnny, 'if she asked for me.' The servant stood looking in front of him at nothing, as seemed to him best. The situation admitted misunderstanding, to say the least. Yet there was no doubt whatever that the girl, looking like a foreign actress, limping to the side-door of Routhwick, had asked for his master, and he could but tell the truth. To his surprise, Mrs. Ingestre showed fight on this occasion.

'You had better let me go, John,' she said quietly, flushing as she spoke. 'It's my business, naturally,—bound to be.'

'Far more likely mine,' said Johnny,—simply to exasperate her, she was sure. How could he,—and before the man?—he was unbearable.

'Show her into the library,' he said to the servant. 'I'll come directly. And—I say—take her some coffee in there,—she'll be cold.'

When the servant had gone, there was a silence, both recollecting themselves, for the crisis had been unexpected, for both. Then Johnny, who was on his feet, turned, and actually apologised.

'Sorry I took the wrong line,' he observed. 'I was startled rather suddenly awake. I had not thought of the thing as it might appear to the domestics—let's say, from the gallery. I hope you—er—see it correctly from the stalls?'

'I don't understand you,' said Ursula dully. Her flush had faded to utter pallor, and she looked ill. She had had another momentary blinding shock at his insistence,—could not escape it, of course. That girl too,—it was really not conceivable. Yet she knew how often he visited Miss Darcy, especially lately: the link, had he needed it, was there.

John made a step to her, and took her wrist. 'Look here,' he said, rather low, 'Lord knows we're at cross purposes, in life, sufficiently. I don't mean to have it about this. If this is stretto, let's get things straight, as strictly straight as possible . . . Ursula.' He made her look at him, by the simple process of saying her name. It was long,—ages, it seemed to her, since he had spoken it. And he said it so attractively, so unlike all other men,—it was unlike all other appellations to her, in that tone. A woman remembers the lover's tone, in her own name, infallibly,—in this case, most cruel memory.

'Don't speak to me,' she said, striving with his hand.

'I will speak, and you have to listen. This is not

melodrama, on my honour,—do just make an effort and turn your mind aside. I know you haven't a scrap of faith in me, and you may be right,—we won't go into that. But in this instance you are wrong, d'you hear? There's an excellent reason why the young person should appear from the void like this, and ask for me. Another reason,—different,—d'you understand?'

'Yes,' she answered faintly.

'Well, next, the young person's line of life, properly speaking, is the same as mine: and odd though it may seem, I take those people seriously.'

He looked at her, and she nodded dumbly again.

'Well, lastly, old Darcy thinks the young person is head-over-ears in love with young Auberon.'

'What?' said Ursula. She put her hand to her brow. It was true, she had heard that,—John had alluded to it when he got the letter one morning, as a joke. 'Oh, Miss Darcy's a fuss,' she said. 'I'd not take her word for it.'

'Well, will you take my word for it I'm not?' said Johnny. 'Nor's she,—I doubt if she likes me even. I rather think she despises me,—quite right too.' He waited. 'There are precious few people I'd let despise me, but she's one. I don't let you,—do you despise me, Ursula?'

He had no right to do it! His voice ran through all its chaffing, charming tones, simply to get her forgiveness for having hurt her,—because she had openly winced once,—when he was torturing her every day.

'Is that all right?' he persisted, as though he really needed reassurance.

'It will do,' said Ursula, swallowing. 'I know you can always—persuade people.'

'That's not fair.'

'Well, you're not fair. Let go of me.' He did so and put his hands behind him. 'You might be more careful—before the servants,' said Ursula, gathering voice and dignity again. She could find neither, while his touch was on her still.

'I know,—it was deuced bad management,—my fault. I should have let you go before me. You were in the right of it. Are you satisfied?'

'Yes,' she gasped surrender. When he had gone, she dropped helplessly back into her place on the sofa again. She felt shaken and ill, her thoughts unstable. She thought she believed him,—in this instance,—it was not that. It was that he should have ventured, in the circumstances, to touch her, hold her, speak in that tone. Unfair,—intolerable,—always where she least expected him to be: always seizing his advantage like that before she could seize hers: always leaving her worsted, exhausted, even when he owned that she was right. . . . She hated him,—yes, she did. She had to hate,—she had no other earthly security.

She sat long, as it seemed to her,—transfixed, gazing at the log-fire, with its cheerful irrelevant spurting of sky-blue flame; unable to look forward or back, to question her sensations, or even to wonder greatly. She could not feel curious about others' remote concerns, when her own suffering possessed her. Then she heard his voice again, speaking to the servant, rating him apparently, anyhow on its sharpest note. He was making a commotion as usual, where none was needed. She supposed she had better go, and arose wearily.

'Idiocy,' said Johnny, standing in the middle of the hall. He held a paper in his hand. 'Why couldn't you do what I told you at once?'

'Why,' said the first servant to the second, 'couldn't you show the young lady to the library at once, instead of leaving her out there?'

The second servant, though frightened, was a female, consequently no young ladies for her. 'I only left her in the entry a minute,' she declared, 'while you went through to Mr. John. She was in such a state with the wet'—here she perceived her mistress, and appealed with confidence

beyond—' that I brought her no farther than the flags, which I washed myself this morning. Then she gave me the parcel for Master, and I put it on the hall-table there, thinking it best. When I went back, she was gone.'

' Gone ? ' said Ursula.

' No sign of her,' said the kitchen-maid positively.

' Go after her,' said Johnny to the man. ' Tell Blandy to go with you, and take a lantern, and look sharp. I've got to see her here, and no delay. And you '—to the girl—' cut along and tell them I want Rachel, quick—don't stop chattering,—I'll come to the stable. . . . Gosh, what a mess ! ' he added, turning at last to his wife, with all his father's bitterness. ' You'd have thought they had a spark of sense among them, anyhow up here. I allow the idiots at the Hall to maunder about, since that's what they think they're paid for. No farther than the flags,—washed this morning!—a girl who'd walked in this weather from Kettley Mill ! '

' Kettley ? She couldn't,' said Ursula promptly. ' She's lame.'

' Lame or no, she's done it. She's come from London,—no other way from the line.' He was in a flame of temper or agitation, she could not be certain which. ' Where are my boots ? ' he said, pushing roughly past her.

' Gone to be dried, probably. John, you're never going out again ? What's the use ? She couldn't get far,—the men will find her. What can be the fuss ? '

' Nothing, except I don't like it,' said Johnny, his back turned as he reached down his riding-coat, already drenched through twice that day. Putting it on, he seemed to make an effort for self-control. ' Better get in, Ursula,—I'll explain later. Here, you can take this.' He put a packet that lay on the hall-table into her hand. ' It's wet,' he observed. ' Look after it, you'll soon see why. And keep a fire in the library, will you ? ' he called over his shoulder. ' Drinks and so on,—we might be late.'

Two minutes later she heard the trampling of the horses

behind the house, on the stones of the stable-yard, and saw the flash of lanterns through the back window in the hall. He meant it actually,—he was going out on the moor-roads, in the driving rain, to look for that lame girl in person, when he had been riding all day.

She sat down once more in her place by the fire, too dazed to be resentful even, quite perplexed. Why should he be so excited, when he asserted, in a manner she had had to credit, the girl was nothing to him? He was really strange, Johnny,—in later years he might become eccentric, if he continued to give rein to all his impulses like this.

After a pause, she rang the bell, and asked for the kitchen-maid to be sent her who had taken part in the scene in the hall; and while she waited, she released the packet John had given her from its wet string and damaged wrappings.

Wonder overcame her anew when she found the Hope miniature within it. Wonders accumulated steadily. Ursula had seen it once or twice before, though she had never taken much interest in her father-in-law's antiques. That was an absorption of Johnny's in which she had never pretended to share. It was a pretty thing, though, the pearls were good. She turned it round and over, and finally looked at the painting.

The little pink-robed Maréchale smiled at her across one shoulder, a mystical, mischievous smile. Like Violet, John had asserted, she remembered, which was partly why she had not cared to study it too frequently. She saw no resemblance, it was his fancy. Violet wore that colour occasionally, but she did her hair quite differently, and had—to say the least of it—less laxity in fastening up her clothes. The ease of the Restoration did not appeal to Ursula. The Maréchale had been a bad woman, anyhow, of that she was convinced. She had left her husband, all sorts of awful things. She had not been a pretty woman either, really: there was another portrait of her in the Hall collection, in which she appeared quite plain. As for

this,—the little white shoulder and neck were pretty, but flattered, of course. The delicate miniature style is flattering always. And even here she was sharp-featured, straight-browed,—a minx.

One of the Ingestres,—the one John was writing about, Ursula had happened to discover,—had been devoted to her, written her letters and verses, and a *journal intime*, and generally done his best to blacken her memory. He had also fought duels for her,—killed several people in cold blood,—as John would doubtless have done for Violet, had he seen a favourable opportunity. Not for Ursula, of course. None of them had ever been known to do it yet for the woman who belonged to them. So Ursula reflected in the bitterness of her spirit: charging him as usual with that passion for romantic incident and artifice which was really hers,—since her colourless spirit thirsted for such adornment, and his could constantly supply its own.

‘Oh,—Hannah,’ said Ursula, as the door opened to the aproned kitchen-maid. ‘I just want to know about this. You let the girl in, didn’t you? She came round to the side-door?’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said the girl, feeling her apron. She seemed, for all her plain and stolid appearance, to have been weeping in the interval.

‘How was it? Don’t be frightened. Did she change her mind about coming in?’

‘No, ma’am: she said from the first she would stop where she was outside. If I’d thought Master would want to see her special——’ (We translate Hannah,—her accent being well beyond any pen.)

‘Yes, I know,’ said Mrs. Ingestre. ‘But you might have brought her in out of the cold,—she is delicate.’ She waited for this to sink in. ‘Then it was about waiting she changed her mind?’

‘Yes, ma’am: took fright of a sudden you’d say——’

‘Did you say anything to frighten her, any of you?’

The girl twisted her apron again ; the truth was in Hannah, but she found it hard to express. ' Kate said she looked like a gypsy,' she burst out. ' I think that's all. I'd have said tramp myself, she was so muddled.'

' Did she say herself she had walked from Kettley ? How did your master hear that ? '

' I didn't hear her say so, ma'am, but she looked it and more. Perhaps it was in the note that Master had,' Hannah added after a moment.

' Ah, she gave you a note as well ? '

' Yes, ma'am, all tied up, the note and the two packets. I left them for Mr. John in the hall.'

Ursula corrected the title mechanically ; she did not like the younger servants using it, whatever the men might do. She would not be Mrs. John herself, either,—it sounded so middle-class. She was extremely particular about such details, always, however distressed or distracted she might be.

' Two packets,' she said. ' Then there was another packet too ? '

' Yes, ma'am, books or something. There's the note still, ma'am, in the hall,' ventured Hannah after a pause. ' It's crumpled a little,—Master threw it down.'

' How like him,' thought Ursula. She had no doubt Hannah had read the crumpled note in crossing the hall, but she remained calm. ' You can bring it,' she said, ' and then make up the library fire. That's all.' She was still curious about the other packet, but had demeaned herself, in her judgment, enough. She gave her orders, easily and firmly, to Hannah, and took the note from her with indifference.

The chances were, of course, that all the kitchen were discussing her and him, and the little third party whose dramatic entrance and exit had been quite in John's favourite style. Added to that, his own uncontrolled behaviour had been enough to spur gossip, especially in such benighted parts as theirs. Ursula had little faith in

the outer respectability of these Yorkshire people, their cumbrous honesty and impassive devotion. She observed they liked her husband, people always did :—Hannah had been crying because he said three cross words to her probably. But that such feeling would deter them from ill-natured jibing at his expense, or at hers, she did not suppose, for a moment.

Consequently, she had a pang of relief to find the note Hannah handed her was in French :—that at least would be beyond them.

‘Sir,’ said the note, in a fine foreign hand. ‘Here is your picture. Will you give this to Mr. Auberon? Your faithful servant.’

That was all,—no name.

Well then, why had John been so frightened? That was simple enough. Looking back, she saw his behaviour now as anxiety, or apprehension. The note was sober and straightforward, and respectfully expressed: even a prying menial could have found nothing in it. Had there been another note for Mr. Auberon which he had also read? A book, the girl said: a small book too, since John had pocketed it. Ursula now remembered having seen him put something away.

And why Mr. Auberon? Why his name so introduced? There was new food for speculation in that. She remembered Miss Darcy’s report, which John repeated lately. Could there be anything really in it? Could a child of that age be really in love with him? Of course, Ursula was ready to admit his attraction. What if he should return the feeling? The girl was a gypsy, as the cook said,—a little witch. What in that case became of the scheme for attaching him to Helena?—But Ursula could not believe it; he was not at all that sort of man. It was John’s nonsense, and Miss Darcy’s everlasting fussing, no more.

Out of sheer curiosity, for she was very tired, she

remained up till midnight. She heard the rain not falling, but thundering down,—raining as it can only rain in our beloved island's mountain districts,—splashing on the drenched court and strong stone-work of the house. It had been so raining, more or less, for forty-eight hours : awful weather, as even the natives said. The Mule, their neighbouring river, was raging high, threatened such floods as were remembered in John's childhood, five-and-twenty years ago. The old bridge at Kettley, the nearest crossing to Routhwick, was in danger, and would doubtfully stand the strain of the volume of mountain water that shouldered and surged past, overpowering the huge limestone blocks that paved its course the length of the dale. Ursula had that day heard her servants discussing it, in the dialect she hated,—which John loved, and could imitate, at need, superbly well. He often went into the kitchen to talk to them. She had found him there that very morning, sitting on the table, drying his wet clothes by a splendid fire, and while he attended to the cook's discourse, breaking bits to nibble off the great curling sheets of oatcake she had suspended from the beam. Conversation was curtailed when 'the mistress' entered, naturally; but she had heard that fact about the bridge, and about the bad floods further down the valley where it opened out towards the town.

However, rain or no, none of the men came back to the house before one o'clock, though once she heard barking, and speculated whether they had returned to let loose the dogs. That was dangerous,—the dogs were fierce,—unless John himself were there. He could manage them, naturally, as Ursula could herself, at need. He and she were dog-lovers, and had trained many in partnership. But it was hopeless their following scent in this rain, she wondered it should be attempted, but that Johnny rated his dogs' intellect above their patient noses. He was clever as a dog himself, resourceful, prompt, no means would escape him, so far as any means were available in the rain-sodden, pitch-black night.

Ursula grew bored, extremely. Prompt for practical means herself, she was not rich in mental commentary or imagination. She tried to comment on her husband's proceeding, but comment in every direction was blocked. The rules by which he lived, if he had rules, were dark to her: the things that bulked important, or stirred him to the quick, were never hers. There were but two lines of explanation of his present conduct open, really, if he were not urged by a shameful interest in the girl: the everlasting obligation of justice, and the universal service owed to youth. Of the former Ursula had at present no inkling, the second she would not face; only, as time went on, her hand pushed the miniature, little by little, away from her,—why? She saw no likeness there to her first little rival: and never for a moment—not for more than a moment—did those scenes before her marriage, when the beautiful enigma of childhood first struck him, in her despite, come up. Why in any case should she be troubled by flashes of his face in youth to-night? He was hers no longer: dead, or else she was. She was frozen, she greatly preferred to be.

He reminded her of it himself anew, when he at last came in, dripping, and would do nothing but stand by the dark window of the library, watching, as though he still longed to be out.

'She's a kid,' said Johnny, in answer to all his wife's arguments and representations. It was long before she could make him leave the window, the relentless roar of the rain, and come near, or at least nearer, to the warmth and comfort she had prepared.

After a time he told her a little of what they had been doing, not much; it was not interesting, being nothing but search and enquiry, totally unrepaid; and he told her, when more closely pressed, some history,—the history of the Maréchale's portrait. He told it in his manner, which was not Quentin's; for, in the intervals of his inquiries and explorations, during those dark hours past,

he had been coming, by quick intuitive stages, to quite a different conclusion.

'The thing's been sold, you see,' said Johnny, 'and for a song.'

Ursula did not see it, so he had to explain to her, while he dried. He showed her what she had altogether failed to notice, a small label hanging to the miniature ring. The sum of five pounds was clearly marked on the label.

'You mean it was sold for five pounds?' ejaculated Ursula.

'No, for less: two or three, probably. Five was the sum for which she bought it back.'

'She bought it? She couldn't,—she's no money.'

'Well, made him,' said Johnny. 'It's all the same.' As Ursula stared, he went on, in a manner of certainty which amazed her. 'The man got hold of it,—her father,—by some means, I shall see what presently, if I can't guess first; and sold it, of course,—luckily to a fool who didn't know its value, or we'd have been done, for good; and the girl never even learnt of the loss till Auberon was suddenly down on her. . . . I don't blame Auberon, mind, I put him up to it,—thought myself jolly clever too,—I'd have sworn she was the thief. . . . But I used him, see?—being rushed in London: and he used his methods, which are probably—er—less elastic than mine, see?—and it never struck me that we might both be wrong, and if so, guilty of rank brutality,—the rankest on the list.' As Ursula had no comment or question, he added pensively, leaning back against the tall chimney-piece,—'Because she was in love with him all the time.'

'That's only Miss Darcy's idea——' began Ursula.

'It isn't, it's mine,' snapped Johnny. 'You've got to believe it. Nothing else explains the case.'

'The note, you mean? I read the note,' mentioned Ursula.

'Hang the note! Nothing else explains the whole position. It simply won't bear any other interpretation. D'you hear?'

'I hear. Don't be so cross, John. Why don't you go to bed, if you're tired?'

'I can't.'

His eyes moved to the window, furtively as it were. He had turned his shoulder to her, but his fingers were snapping unconsciously, hanging at his side. Every inch of him was impatience baffled, energy foiled. She could not but observe it. He did not waste breath saying that it was wholly extravagant, unheard of, that a child of sixteen in quite low water should travel from London to Yorkshire in order to restore him his small piece of property in person, and then, oblivious of possible profit or reward, vanish into the wilderness again. It fell in easily, as it seemed, with John's conception of the girl: a conception picked up at random, since he could at most have had only a few scattered glimpses of her; whereas Ursula had had the benefit of a prolonged and searching enquiry, the whole object of which had been Miss Jacoby's religious practice and principles, and had dismissed her at the end in very fair security. Not that it was the first time, of course, that John's views and Ursula's upon a young female had failed to coincide,—that was always happening; but in this case his rush of ready conviction, indifferent as it were, seemed threatening to disturb her own.

'What was it she left for Mr. Auberon?—a letter?' she asked.

'A book.' His hand moved to his pocket. 'Her journal. Of course the whole evidence is there.'

'John! Why don't you look, then?'

'I can't,' he said again, frowning. 'Can't you see?'

Ursula found she had to 'see,' since his manner really allowed her no escape. She disliked the necessity, conscious of being swept from her everyday bearings into a larger, darker world, the world into which, all this time, he had been looking steadily.

'What do you think—she's done?' she said, nervously.

'I *hope* that one of the sixty odd people I have warned

to-night have arrested her. I've been at two stations and all the inns, and most of the farms, and driven my wishes into their thick skulls all I know.'

'Yes?' said Ursula.

'I hope that. And I fear——'

'Don't, John!' She broke in upon him. 'She—she couldn't, at her age.'

'No child-suicides in the world, are there?' he said. 'Did you ever look at the statistics?'

'There aren't, *here*.' So spoke the Englishwoman, obstinately.

'Well, and she didn't belong *here*. She belonged—that of her that didn't belong to the stars—to the most neurotic nation in Europe,—and she showed it too, at every turn. I was frightened a bit, that time she acted. So was Fanny, though she didn't say much. I bet she was thinking the same. Kid was all right in the shop, you know,—the trade, I don't mean that. She wanted working hard, though, working to death,—some of them do. She never seemed quite—I'm speaking in the past tense,' said Johnny, breaking off of a sudden. 'I don't want to, I want to keep sight of all the chances. There are other chances, of course,—perhaps I'm a fool. But it feels bad to me, distinctly bad. Since we're alone I don't mind saying so. I know the sort, you know,—I've so to speak met it about. . . . And the river's there,' he added.

Ursula remained transfixed and staring, while he spoke. 'The river?' she repeated after him uncomfortably. 'It's dangerous, of course,—the bank's steep near the road.'

'Dangerous, that's it,' agreed Johnny. 'Jolly dangerous.' His dark eyes, unusually brilliant, pierced her passingly, above the clouds of his own steam. The hot fire had penetrated him by this time, and he was steaming like a volcano. Ursula put out a hand to feel his sleeve, and for once he let her, tamely.

'I don't know why you always like to think—the worst,'

she said resentfully, replying to the look, as she dropped the hand.

'Face it,' substituted Johnny. 'Better to face the worst, along with the other chances. Then you can look at 'em, and compare, and take the most probable, can't you?' She said nothing, so he elaborated. 'It might be an accident, as you say. She might have left the road, and walked along the bank to—er—see the view, and got too near, and slipped in, mightn't she? Only it's not probable, because you don't see views at midnight: and as for warning, the beck itself would warn her, fast enough. The Mule's making a bit of a noise to-night. Listen!' He threw back his head.

Ursula did not listen. 'Well,' she said, as coolly as she could, folding her hands, 'being so clever, what do you propose to do?'

'Oh,—er—much what you would have done if it had been an accident,' said Johnny, turning tiresome at once, as soon as he had divined her curiosity. 'Because the results would be just the same in the two cases. Specially in a stream as quite considerably out of hand as the Mule is this evening.'

'Don't talk like that,' said Ursula in her repressive tone. Johnny let himself be repressed: he did not seem much to want to be otherwise.

'I must write to Auberon,' was his next remark, after a space of motionless reflection against the chimney-piece. 'I wired, but I said I was writing, so I must.' He felt for his pen.

'You needn't, now,' protested Ursula. 'Do leave it till the morning.'

He merely said he must, while it was fresh. He had to tell Auberon just what he had done, and meant to do, to spare his coming uselessly from London. Of course, one man was enough: and Johnny was, or had been, equally concerned.

Ursula refused to see that he was the least responsible.

So far as she could gather from his account, in the practical matter of the theft, he had only done what anyone would do. She did not see why they should be further concerned with it, really. The girl, having played off her little coup, her little score, as John would say, had gone back to her disreputable father, probably. It was only vexatious that Ursula should ever have been beguiled into recommending her,—a girl who played tricks on men like Mr. Auberon and John. However, it was no use arguing with her husband, in this state. She let him go his way.

‘Mr. Auberon won’t be back in town till Monday,’ she observed presently. ‘He’s still at that place above Kendal. The Falkland girl knows his movements, and she’s coming to us to-morrow.’

‘Is she?’ said Johnny absently. He was writing. ‘Kendal then,—I’ll send to both.’

‘If you’d spoken to me before you went out,’ said Ursula after another interval, moralising in a quiet room, ‘you needn’t have wasted a telegram.’

‘It won’t be wasted, it’ll get round,’ said Johnny, still absent. Of course, he would never allow her to be right : that was inconceivable. He played with his report to Mr. Auberon for some time,—he did not seem to be thinking much about it, smoking, and fidgeting about, and looking out of the window. ‘Fidgeting’ was Ursula’s word, ridiculously inappropriate to his lazy, easy movements. But then John did everything by means of appearing not to do it : Ursula had never seen him sit seriously down to a thing in his life. How he got through his letters, she never could imagine, considering the variety and voracity of his correspondents : yet he managed somehow to content them all, and he contented himself, by the things he wrote, enormously. He covered a sheet or two, to his satisfaction, to-night. After that he wrote to Miss Darcy that the Maréchale had turned up, and he hoped to send her news of the other young person shortly,—Ursula never even suggested this, it was his own idea. Then at last he could

be persuaded to settle, or sleep if so inclined, in his chair. Move to the upper floor he would not,—Ursula began to wonder if he meant to stay there all night. But he might be intending to migrate to his log-house as soon as she left him in peace : he had all the materials for camping there, since it was his pleasure to believe he could use it if he wished. In ways like that, he was a schoolboy. Wherever he was he liked to have a corner, a retreat,—played, as it were, with his independence. Ursula had grown used to it : she even had a theory that he had done it in youth to escape from his father, and had made the habit too young to break it easily.

Now she might have left him to his devices,—she was tired out,—only she did not want solitude at present : she felt safer, curiously, at his side. The idea that he could face the chance of that girl drowning herself, on a nasty wet night like this, calmly as he did, or at least easily,—it stirred very unpleasant sensations. She tried to believe it was his nonsense, love of posing, love of teasing her,—such a thing could not remain sober possibility by the light of day. Yet he had not looked light-minded when he talked, the contrary : and he was certainly putting himself out in an unusual degree.

She decided to converse, at last, as the least of evils. Thinking wearied her so. Unluckily as soon as she wished for conversation, John seemed more inclined to go to sleep. However, whenever her nervous little observations reached him, he was pleasant enough ; at least he did not snap, as he had done when he first came in.

‘ They say Kettley bridge is dangerous,’ she remarked once, in the growing stillness of the room : forgetting he had heard when she did. ‘ The engineer’s been down to look at it.’

‘ So they told me,’ said Johnny, stirring. ‘ I crossed it twice this evening.’

‘ John !’ She jumped. ‘ How could you ?’

‘ It was quite easy,’ said Johnny, arranging his arms

behind his head. 'And by the same token, though it's been damned—condemned—since this morning, that ass Levinson had never set a watch. Anyone could get across it,—so I did, on Rachel.'

'But why?'

'Quickest way to the line, of course; I wanted to be at the station before the up-train. It's my bridge, not Levinson's,' added Johnny, as though that had anything to do with it.

Kettley Bridge had been for a century back a bone of contention between the two families who owned land on either side of the Mule. Ursula, of course, knew the story,—indeed, living with Johnny, she had heard too much of it. There had been a Suit in Chancery, or something of that sort, on the subject, in the time of John's grandfather, the Ingestre of the day: who had, to the disgust of his descendant, lost the case. Kettley Bridge, its rights, and its reparation, were adjudged to the other party, with whose present representative, Lord Levinson, the Ingestres had naturally picked as many quarrels as possible, ever since. But the bridge remained the sorest point: and Ursula, glancing at John's face, suspected him of being secretly pleased, now that the 'ass' Levinson had proved himself so palpably unworthy of his charge. It consoled Johnny for much, that fact; even for the prospect of the whole of the Routhwick inhabitants being forced, in the event of the bridge's collapse or disablement, to go eight miles round to the railway.

She returned to the immediate matter of his recklessness in riding over. She talked for some time about it, and Johnny listened to the lecture, eyes cast down. 'You might have sent somebody,' was her final remark.

'My best enemy?' enquired Johnny. 'I say, you ought to have been a mediæval baron's wife.' He added, as though recollecting for her benefit,—'I didn't notice any cracks going across,—nor did Rachel, or she'd have let me know. I expect Levinson's engineer's a fool.'

'Anyone but you, of course,' said Ursula.

'I should have been sorry to lose Rachel,' said Johnny, after a prolonged silence. Ursula had thought he was asleep, but he seemed to have been thinking it over.

She found no reply, so the subject dropped.

II

'The bridge is gone,' was his first remark the next morning. He greeted her with it when she came downstairs. 'One pier is breached completely, and the rest will go in the day. I say, the river's colossal. You'll have to come and look.'

It was still raining without, though less furiously, and from a slightly clearer sky; but even that, in other parts of the country, would have been called a very wet day. However, since it was evident that most of her household had turned out to look at the Mule in spate, Mrs. Ingestre did likewise. It was certainly, in its way, a thrilling sight, and stirred even her apathy a little. There was a vast quantity of water,—three times as much as usual,—four, five times, it was useless to calculate,—and it was making a great noise. She had heard the noise in the night as she lay awake, and had some thoughts of thankfulness that the house had not been built nearer to such a clattering stream. Ursula did not go as far as the bridge, naturally, not having breakfasted,—that was a mile away; but the country people and servants, standing in groups about the steep bank with skirts or kerchiefs over their heads, pointed her out a piece of the masonry, with an obliterated figure of the bridge's date upon it, which had been swept down as far as Routhwick gates.

Ursula looked at it, vaguely impressed; the thing had once been an object in the landscape, certainly; but she could not have John's feelings, who had known Kettley bridge from his earliest years. He had been up early,

—if he had slept at all,—and talked to everyone, including Lord Levinson's engineer, through his hands, across the river : though he carefully abstained from addressing that worthy proprietor himself.

'He's chiefly pleased with himself for having said so, yesterday,' said Johnny sarcastically, of the engineer. 'And when I asked if Levinson would build it up during the next half-century, he said nothing ; or at least, nothing that I could understand.'

'Perhaps Lord Levinson was too near him,' said Ursula.

'Or perhaps,' suggested Johnny, 'he had never been taught to speak.' He had to score over that engineer somehow. 'Bridge went at about three o'clock,' he added pensively. 'Jove, I wish I'd been there !'

'And you crossed it——'

'About five hours previously. Five hours too soon,' said Johnny, as he walked back to the house at her side. 'Too soon for the fun, of course, I mean.'

Ursula wished he would not be so silly. He had done the same thing the night before, hinting,—it annoyed her. It was simply boasting,—John was not the least the kind of man to kill himself, or to let himself be killed tamely, in any circumstances. She felt a good deal more secure than Johnny's own mother had felt, as to that. He was too fond of his own comfort, for one thing, not to say his own appearance. The wife's view of the husband is biassed a little after, say, ten years' matrimony at his side, by the fact that she must provide food and easy chairs for him, in all circumstances. A civilised home-keeping wife, like Ursula, seldom sees her man in the most flattering circumstances,—she invariably sees him in the least flattering, and beyond escape. She has to take much on faith, in short : and since Ursula's faith in her young man was limited, and since he swept her out of the way whenever he turned active, or took things in earnest, she had little chance to improve her views.

She had not seen him, for instance, that morning, when he

stood at break of day by the wrecked bridge of his childhood, and looked at all the water-spirits of the white Mule, whiter in the dawn, broken loose, gluttled with conquest, careering down the dale. It was a spectacle to go to the heart of any hill-bred man. Johnny always upheld the Yorkshire rivers against all native rivals, against the Scotch, against the Welsh,—even against that majestic Dart, set in golden bracken and age-worn rock, which Helena, very properly, had advanced against him once in conversation. Standing there, watching the Mule's mad race, letting himself be bemused by its innumerable noises, he had wanted Helena instantly, instinctively,—just to show her how wrong she was! She was in every outburst of Nature's glory for him, as the beloved always is for those that haunt the shrine. This was his country, his own beck, he could have sketched her the shape of every rock in sight from that bridge,—those rocks which were now overwhelmed and formless with white water. He had washed there, waded there, plunged in midday heat into the shadowed pools, he was king of every curve of that water-way, simply by right of knowing it, not because his father owned the land. So he drew Helena into his reverie, being his own as well, sharing his raptures of necessity: and they watched it together in the slowly-growing light.

Nor had his wife seen him the night before, when he devoted himself for several hours of unrelaxing effort to the quest for the other girl, the lost one; directing half a dozen assistants, and not sparing himself. That, his business incarnation, she hardly knew better than his imaginative one. This morning too, before Ursula found and fed him, he had been about the work again: examining the various nets he had spread over-night, to see if that little fish were caught in one of them; and again at table he was absent rather, put out and puzzled by his unsucccess. Jill might have been a ghost or a fairy, she had passed so utterly disregarded. Yet she was a figure to attract the Yorkshire attention, lame and un-English, her hair queerly

dressed and her accent peculiar,—most outlandish to their views. Ursula put that point as she made the coffee, and John seemed to accept it, for a time.

Then he broke out with a theory of her genius,—that those who can act at all, can act anything. Having got his coffee out of Ursula's deliberate hands, and feeling happier in consequence, he elaborated this view, carrying it to absurd extremes, as soon as she objected. When Jill passed the ticket-collector, he said,—always granted she came by rail at all,—she was looking exactly as plain and cantankerous as one of the Leeds mill-girls, whom she had been studying in the train. When she enquired the way to Routhwick,—as she must have had to enquire from somebody,—she was looking exactly as Londonified and pretty-pretty as one of those girls from the other place, summoned urgently from the south to join the Routhwick staff.

'Do you mean the housemaid at the Hall?' said Ursula patiently.

Yes, Johnny meant her: the one with all the hair, a most loathsome female. That little girl Hannah last night, the one that washed the flags, was ten times her superior.

'You didn't think so at the time,' said Ursula. 'You frightened poor Hannah,—she had been crying when she came to me.'

Johnny seemed interested, but not remorseful. It did not hurt any of them to cry at times. He explained it was really because his standard for the Routhwick girls was so elevated. She could tell Hannah that, if she liked, or he would if he happened to see her. The chances were, to-day, that he would be doing other things.

Ursula took this to indicate that he would not be found in the kitchen in the middle of the working-morning: which was as well for the household order generally, and the steadiness of the younger maids. Nor was he: she saw little of him all day.

When the belated post came in,—delayed by the floods,

or the bridge's collapse, so Ursula vaguely comprehended,—he was there, appeared as it were from nowhere, and claimed his part. Ursula had a card from Helena Falkland, which she kept: and though his eye was on it, he asked no question. She also had a long and piteous screed from old Miss Darcy, which she handed to John, having glanced it through with a shrug. He took it away, with the rest of his things, to study in retirement, or on horse-back, or ranting about the grounds,—whatever he had immediately in prospect: she did not ask.

As the day proceeded he grew wilder, more oddly radiant, like his mood of the night before with a difference, the sulkiness or nervousness was swept away. Why not? Helena's spirit had been with him in the dawn, as he stood by the river; and all day long her body was drawing nearer, by the devious dawdling lines from Kendal. He felt it was: he had no need of time-tables or post cards: he was sure.

Ursula chased him after luncheon, since he did not come in for that meal, enquired of everybody, found he had been in most places, and ran him down finally in his own log-house in the Lyke-wood, at about three o'clock. She met coming away from the log-house as she approached it a person who saluted her, and whom she just recognised as the police-constable from Egstone, their nearest town.

'Well?' said Johnny impatiently: as though she had not at least as much right there as the police.

'I only wanted to know your intentions,' said Ursula, with beautiful moderation, and in an agreeable tone.

'What about?' He did not lift his eyes to hers.

'Those children,—the Falklands. Are you going to meet them? Because if not, I must. They will have to come right round by Egstone, and that's eight miles.'

'I know,' said Johnny. 'I told them at the stable. Eight miles is nothing on a decent road.'

'Then you're going?'

'Of course.'

'Of course,' thought Ursula. It was not his habit to meet the lady visitors. It was only this visitor he was bound to meet. Yet she had not been certain he would go : he had been so odd, lately. 'I wasn't sure,' she said aloud, 'if you knew the train.'

'There's only one they could come by,' said Johnny. 'Now get out,—do you mind?'

A spurt of sheer rudeness, just like him : and when there was not the least necessity. Ursula wished he would at least preserve the forms. At times he did, even in private, and always before the world. But she could not count on him ; every now and then he would give her these cruel starts, unforeshadowed, showing her, as it were, the truth,—the clean, naked, paralysing truth she wished not to look upon.

She surprised herself in the wood by a sob,—she who never cried. It was wicked of him, it really was,—what did he mean by it? For a minute she felt like a child, as helpless, and as mindless too. She was tired, tired of trying to follow him, cling to him through all his blinding changes ; she was dazed, it was all a work for which she was not made. How could he clasp her wrist and speak her name as he had done last night, and then level a blow at her, across her face, such as lay in the manner and tone of that last sentence? It was wearing her out, slowly and surely. She could not go on so, for a lifetime. She might be driven to ask mercy soon.

That his manner was always directly influenced by hers, she did not know : for she flattered herself she had but one manner. Whenever she was thoroughly false in look and tone, he shrank and struck out instinctively. The night before she had been peaceable and ordinary, a pleasant background in wife-like guise,—she had not disturbed him, and he had let her be. He had even amused her a little. For a short period she had been—quite unaware to herself—piteous, and really appealing. It was then he had reassured her, and taken her hand. Insensitive as she

was, the million shades of manner in mortal intercourse had no effect upon Ursula ; she could only say when John was nice, and when he was cruel to her. That she knew.

It drew her unwilling tears, now in the little wood. She had to stand, resting against a writhen oak, and recover herself. Life, at that instant, came to a stand-still : misery, weariness, was all her world. She wished she had not asked Helena, she did not want the effort of entertaining her. She saw how it would be : John would be brilliant and delightful,—he was furbishing himself for it, pluming himself for a display, anyone could see. She would be at her worst, fail to retain her place, struggle vainly for a full share of her rights, and of course collapse. The girl would see it: he intended to show his power, sacrifice her : that was his revenge,—and her last card was played.

She went slowly back to the house, when her limbs felt stronger. On the way she bethought herself, and diverted to the stable.

‘ Mr. John will go to the station, Jarvis,’ she said. ‘ You need not drive round to the front. Only take plenty of rugs, won’t you. It’s rather late for a long drive.’

‘ Yes ’m,’ said the man. He had his orders already, but that was illicit as he recognised, behind-scenes, since a young lady was arriving. His mistress never failed her part, however her husband trespassed on her functions. The servants felt, and admired, that immutable standard of dignity, serenity in all circumstances, which she possessed. He made no single disrespectful comment when she had gone.

‘ Mrs. Ingestre looks ill,’ he said to his colleague in the yard. ‘ I’d some hope this air would set her up, better than it’s done.’

‘ Ah,’ said the other man, pleasantly agreeing.

‘ It’s a pity, too,’ added Jarvis, ‘ when it suits Mr. John so well.’

‘ Folks is different,’ said the other man, half-audibly. He was almost buried under hay.

Harold the philosopher, during the abundant leisure of their tiresome journey, wondered more than once if that cad Ingestre,—granted he was at Routhwick, which Harold could hardly credit of his impudence,—would have the face to come to the station. He hoped not. . . .

Not that he had any doubts of being able to stand up to him in perfect style, especially where Helena was in question, however much glitter or 'side' Ingestre might offer to disconcert him. Harold needed not the resource of 'side,' his own destined attitude of sublime contempt having a perfectly solid foundation. There was no attacking it. A man, already the husband of somebody else, who could make Helena look—well, as she was looking now, sitting in her further corner, with her head leaning against the cushion,—when there was a fellow like Auberon only needing a little time and tactful management to marry her, was a man whom all righteous, not to say all exquisite persons, barred. Harold 'barred' him. He offered him the renowned black ball. Ingestre might think himself superior, but he was not in it, simply nowhere. Harold had thought about it from all possible points of view, and he was sure.

Helena, meanwhile, was contentedly, dreamily certain that the end of the tiresome journey meant his—Mr. Ingestre's face. He was still that to her, he kept his title, his crown, even though he had held her in his arms. She loved her brother and Quentin, they had been very good to her, cared for her beautifully, smoothed all obstacles, shown her, with the least effort possible, wondrous things. Men were all nice,—Helena had that happy experience,—but he was nicest, and noblest : and she would see him soon.

She only wanted to see him, to be sure that he still wanted her, that she could serve him, if it were only by being near. His letters were beautiful and like him, but it was not enough : she longed for his presence too, and his hand. His touch was wonderful : from the first, no other man had ever touched her so. In dancing, in rehearsing,

in acting, he had done so repeatedly, indifferently,—he did not know his own power. The thrill, the shiver of rapture it gave her would probably be absurd to him, if she could ever find the courage to confide. His face was different from his masterful fingers, certainly: but she liked his curious questing glance as well. She marvelled whether he had ever looked at anyone else like that; she cherished a shy hope that he never had.

Well, she had it, at the station, glance and touch as well, at least for a moment. He was there—all of him—very much so. Helena confided things to him at once.

‘It *has* been wet,’ she laughed, standing at his elbow, while he reached her properties out of the train.

‘Well, what do you expect, in the district?’ laughed Johnny, radiant as she.

‘That’s what we said to one another, every morning. But we expected better of it really. Of course it didn’t matter the least, we did everything we wanted to, and we were generally fairly dry in the evenings. Anyhow the water on us was hot, not cold. Oh,—you do know my brother, don’t you? Fancy,’—she looked from one to the other,—‘I thought you must.’

Harold refused to fancy anything. He thought Helena far too easy,—as for the cad, his ease was revolting. Harold was stiff. As he walked stiffly behind them up the platform, he began to think that, all the same, he had undertaken a rather ticklish responsibility. Perhaps he had grown a little too used, of late, to Auberon’s moral support. And he suddenly wished Helena did not catch attention on all sides, as she did when she was really happy. She had no right to be happy in Ingestre’s society,—lovely still less. He would have to talk to her about it.

‘I promise you,’ said Johnny solemnly, as he packed her into the carriage, ‘this evening, that you shall be really dry. Will that suffice?’

‘Entirely,’ said Helena. ‘You mean it’s a thick house?’

'Thickish. Unluckily all the approaches to it are at present broken down, owing to the—er—water.'

'Oh, Mr. Ingestre! Can't we get there?' She was laughing, brows up, just as he had longed to see her laugh.

'We heard,' said Harold stiffly, 'about the broken bridge.'

'Not for some hours,' said Johnny to Helena. 'What's worse,'—he looked in her eyes,—'I must leave you and your brother to make your way to Routhwick alone. I have business here myself, and I mustn't keep you.—Am I excused?' said his eyes. Helena's answered them.

'Falkland,' said Johnny suddenly, 'would you mind coming this way a minute? It's a point I want to settle, and it strikes me you can help.'

Harold, who had jumped at the summons, highly unexpected as it was, went tamely; and they walked into the station entrance, while Helena made friends with the dogs.

'Can you tell me,' said Johnny, cutting crisply into business, as soon as she was out of sight, 'if Auberon got my telegram this morning? I wired to him in London last night.'

'He got it before we left Kendal,' said Harold. 'He was meaning to stop on there, till he heard.'

'Stopped up, did he? Lucky then I doubled my letter. There was no necessity to stop.'

'He seemed to think there was,' said Harold. He waited, then his stiffness gave way a little. 'He's a man who's nuts on a job, never lets it slide.'

'So I have always supposed,' said Johnny, politely. 'Er—isn't he due in town on Monday?'

'Yes, but I expect he could get out of it, really, at least for another day. I mean,' said Harold, 'he only thinks he's wanted.'

'I feel for him,' said Johnny. 'Your sister, I suppose, knows nothing about the business.' Harold merely shook his head. 'Do you?'

'I know all Auberon knows, which wasn't much when I left him. He was pretty puzzled, if I may say so. It seemed deuced odd?'

'It is. It's nasty too, and getting nastier.' Johnny glanced backward. 'I mustn't keep Miss Falkland. We can talk later on, to-night. I only wanted to know if she knew, and whether he had commissioned you.'

'Me?' ejaculated Harold. 'Auberon? Good Gosh, no,—he wouldn't think of it. Sooner than that,' he added, 'he'd come himself.'

'Right,' said Johnny, turned, and called over his shoulder his apologies to Helena. His eyes dwelt one moment on her golden head; then he vanished into the opening of the station.

Mr. Falkland went back to the carriage thoughtfully. He climbed in, pushing away the dogs. His eyes had a dreamy expression. He was wondering,—as ordinary mortals wonder about the powers beyond,—what would happen if Quentin Auberon and that fellow Ingestre should meet.

Johnny had debated long, all the morning when he was not thinking of Helena, how much it was his business to let young Auberon know of the evidence that had fallen into his hands regarding Jill Jacoby,—regarding her ideas, intentions, and all too probable fate. It was a most extraordinary coil, and he scolded himself for the conviction that was weighing on him, growing in weight, that the girl had left Routhwick in sudden panic that night, having restored his property to him, only to take leave of all her earthly troubles, as soon as possible, under cover of the night. He would have done so in her place, that was all of which he could be certain. It was by feeling along the line of her individuality that certainty reached him,—that 'temperament' always really so simple, to him so familiar, which even in its feminised variety he could guess.

That was his strongest evidence, that instinctive knowledge: beyond that he had the girl's written testimony in her strange 'journal,' and old Miss Darcy's letter to his wife, with its lament that Jill had been 'so queer' those last days, and then gone, left her in the lurch.

He had glanced at the journal, only glanced, but enough to be sure that the idea of suicide had never been strange to the child. She had nourished herself, through the dangerous phase of exotic girlhood, on the parallel problems of love and death. Her own deformity absorbed her too, as he suspected. In life, her alternate seductive use of it, and gallant disregard for it, were a symptom. Without it, and the other impediment, her father, Jill could have done anything, mounted anywhere, so she clearly believed.

Well, that was bad, a very bad beginning. Worse came, when the will to love and be loved, at all costs, possessed her,—when she came to see that as the only solution, the single escape. Johnny passed those pages,—they were not things for a man to read. Only, the mere fact that she had let such matter out of her hands was significant of loss of balance,—must mean some voluntary abandonment to despair.

Beyond that, vindication of herself in the matter of the theft, and vindictiveness,—a good measure of that as well. She certainly meant to pay the man out for daring to suspect her, that had been part of her plan. She had a double weapon against him, confession and self-martyrdom, and she used both. She vanished, and left a sting behind her, secure in the fact that he would feel it. So he would, not a doubt. Clever, but not permissible, thought Johnny. He had closed the journal half-read, determining that that boy, clean and steady and sane, perfectly just in his dealings so far as his lights would carry him, should never look into it. There was no need. There was no reason to bring a strong man down, lay him low, with the reckless insinuations of a neurotic girl. It was not fair to her, the child, either. Viewing her as a child, it was not fair.

Her self-vindication in the affair of the portrait was, however, complete; and that being John's business also, equally his reproach, he studied in detail. It was easy, for the last entry in the book was a kind of summary of her case, which, if true, acquitted her. Jill had put the

miniature away, just as Miss Darcy had described, beneath the eyes of her employer, following directions, and barely regarding it: only, she failed to lock the drawer. She thought she had, fumbling with the little key, but she had not done so. About a week before she saw Quentin in the square after church, her father had called to see her, and Miss Darcy herself, since Jill was momentarily occupied, let him in. Here entered, of course, Ursula's original mistake or miscalculation, in not having warned Miss Darcy of Jacoby's existence. Jacoby, however, had not asked for his daughter by that name: as 'an old friend,' with no doubt a most taking and airy manner, he had obtained entrance; and Miss Darcy, bent on kindness, had left him in the front room for five minutes while she went to find the girl.

Two minutes, possibly,—that would have been sufficient. Jacoby, interested in the old lady's curios, took a turn round her room, and tried her drawers. He never suspected she could own a thing of colossal value, naturally. The miniature was a handy little object, worth studying at his ease, so he pocketed it, and re-shut the drawer. He did not mention the matter to Jill, and had been sent packing by her, very promptly, when she came. But she had been frightened; and Quentin, that Sunday, had seen the relics of her fear.

Nothing in the book gave evidence of her crisis of horror, when she found herself challenged, suspected, out of the blue, and by the man on whom her little hopes had been building so long. John could imagine that. From that minute, it struck him, her brain was shaken. Strange little remarks and wanderings covered the period of those latter days. The whole was in French, of course, which made the sayings more difficult of rendering. 'She is snoring,' she wrote of Miss Darcy. 'She takes things to make her sleep, but I cannot, just yet.' English occurred in one place, a quotation: "'Men have died and worms have eaten them,'" she quoted Rosalind, "'but not for love.'"—*But*

women are different.' Johnny, glancing here and there, only wondered she had held up so long. She was waiting, so it soon appeared, for her month's salary. Then she met and battled with her father, one morning when Miss Darcy thought her in church, and obliged him, terrorised him by threats of exposure, suicide, what not, to re-purchase or redeem the miniature. In what quarter it had been sold, or pledged, Johnny never discovered; into private and ignorant hands, most probably, since any respectable dealer in the town must have suspected, or at least come nearer to its value. It was surely one of the oddest adventures that little portrait had suffered in a not uneventful life, to be sold and re-purchased for sums which severally would hardly have paid for one of the pearls.

All this he meant to tell Auberon; he had already hinted a part. As for Miss Darcy, he would be able, in time, with judicious manipulation, to soothe her. She really seemed to have cared for the girl, had treated her generously, and was shocked out of all reason by her sudden disappearance, and the note she left to say that she was never coming back. Ungrateful, that note sounded, flippant, if not quite wild. 'Sleep well,' it finished,—that looked as though the former preoccupation as to sleeping,—the need of sleeping,—had returned to the child's half-crazed brain.

By accident, or with intention, Johnny now believed she must have done it. Nothing else could explain her elimination, as it were, from the neighbourhood. She might, of course, have slipped or stumbled to her death. The river must have tempted her, those wild white spirits whose appeal Johnny himself had been barely able to resist. He had let that thought cross his own brain, as he stood by the Mule,—'a magnificent death,'—and magnificence appealed, would appeal to the end, in just the same degree to Jill. If so, of course, they would never find her; they might almost as well give up the search. In miles of torrent water, with endless irregularities, rapids, and deep

pools, it is by a mere chance that an object washed down ever reappears.

He would do what he could, of course, all sensible precautions ; he had been doing so, and authorities were warned in all directions, but especially down-stream. Johnny's name went for much, and he was sure of prompt service and secrecy. Equally of necessity, his little Helena must know nothing : it was all a deal too grim.

That was his last conclusion as he rose from the station bench where he had been reposing, running through in mind the list of telegraph and telephone communications recently sent. The cutting of the nearest road communication with Routhwick was a bore : apt to delay messages, at least such as came along the line. The fact that the following day was Sunday was a bore as well,—a country Sunday being stagnation. However, he thought he had done all, for the moment, that he need.

His tall form passed out of the station slowly. He was reflecting, looking ahead, with Helena—an evening with Helena—solely in his mind.

'Isn't that Mr. Ingestre, of Routhwick?' said a south-country porter, to a boy.

'Course it is,' said the boy contemptuously.

'Well then, you catch him. He's wanted at the office, message just come. No need to telephone it further, if he's here.'

The boy offered to carry the message,—there was more chance that way of a penny for his pains.

'You do as you're told,' said the porter in a particular manner. 'Sharp.'

The boy whistled, seeing his look : turned sober, and went.

Gravity is communicable, somehow : especially through the medium of simple minds. Mr. Ingestre, of Routhwick, happened to be cared for in that neighbourhood,—and Mrs. Ingestre, of Routhwick, had been so in past times, still more.

Johnny read the message offered him, four words long,

without a change of countenance. He had been prepared for it daily, of course, for a month, or thought he had been prepared. The two men at his side, and the breathless boy, had quite unconsciously taken off their hats.

'If you'll allow us to express our sorrow, sir,' said the old station-master, naturally the spokesman, in the fine northern speech which it is a wrong to travesty, 'we have never forgotten her here.'

Johnny looked round him once.

'Thanks,' he said. 'My mother always loved the place. She'd have lived here if she could.'

III

Helena was patient to find his place empty at dinner, Harold was vaguely relieved. Ursula was vexed extremely. The kind of irregularity was what vexed her most, and John did it of late, she was certain, simply to disturb her. What object could he have in such behaviour? Going to meet and flirt with the girl at the station—quite unnecessarily—as he had done, obviously, in his best style; and then failing what was his plain duty at dinner. It looked extraordinary before the servants, too,—if he would only ever think of appearances. Lastly, since she had no explanation to offer, it threw a most uncomfortable burden upon her.

'Mr. John's come back from Kettley, I suppose?' she said to his servant, Blandy, who waited.

'I believe he has returned, madam,' said the young man, with a face of stone. He was immovable, as Ursula had long known: though she used him almost as freely as John. Blandy, much bullied in old days, beautifully trained in about four professions at present, was an anomaly in a respectable household,—as much so as John's studio in London. He had gone camping with Johnny and his special gang, both before and after marriage, and people like the Earl of Dering treated him, under Ursula's

nose, like a dear old friend. He was certainly not a valet, that was absurd : he was something between a maid-of-all-work and an orderly. He was still more like one of those 'second young men' beloved of Shakespeare, who hear all their master's secrets, are used as a dumping-ground for his humours and a practising-ground for his wit, and are rewarded with casual bags of gold and the hand of the gentlewoman, at the back of the stage, while the lord and lady settle up their affairs in front. Blandy had been offered this part in old days, no doubt unconsciously, and he filled it with conscious precision. He was extremely good-looking and very well-dressed, and he would have gone to the stake for Johnny.

'Is he down at the bungalow?'—Ursula insisted on this offensive suburban title for the Lyke-wood house.

'He might be, madam,' said Blandy.

'Well, does he know that dinner is ready?' said Mrs. Ingestre lightly, 'because he has been known to forget. Anyhow we are not going to wait for him.'—She addressed her guests. 'He's writing, probably, that's his way. He has sudden fits of it, and nothing will move him.'

'What is he writing?' said Helena, rather shy. Johnny, in his various confidences, had not communicated the life-history of his great-grandfather's great-uncle,—he thought it unsuitable to Helena's ears. Her eyes, rather, since most of his confidences had been on paper lately. It was painful to him not to tell her, since it interested him extremely : but he had desisted, with care.

'You mustn't ask,' said Ursula, smiling. 'If you ask, he says—"Oh, something I thought of,"—just like a boy at school. He's terribly afraid of being taken for a literary light, did you know? Nothing hurts John's feelings so much as being thought literary. I've often noticed it.'

'Well, literary people are rather irksome, aren't they?' said Harold. 'I've known one or two.'

Ursula turned to that side with relief. She had taken to Harold at once.

'Is Mr. Auberon irksome?' she asked demurely.

'Auberon doesn't write books.'

'What does he do?' said Ursula.

'Yes,—what does he?' said Helena. 'I believe Quentin's a humbug really. He looks fearfully wise, and asks weightily for the butter, and opens his letters as if——'

'Helena,' said Harold, 'you'll be sorry for what you're saying. Don't go on.'

'How many times have you three quarrelled in three weeks?' said Ursula in the pause, as Miss Falkland laughed. The servant Blandy's eyes were fixed on her as she laughed. Blandy was lamenting sorely his master's absence. He had seldom, in his varied experience in Johnny's wake, seen such a nice young lady.

'We haven't really,' said Helena. 'Harold and I tried; but he always intervened in such a far-sighted manner, that it didn't seem worth it for the next hundred years or so, and we stopped.'

'In whose favour did he intervene?' said Ursula.

'Harold's,' said Helena.

'Liar!' said Harold, leaning back. 'Mrs. Ingestre, look here. Auberon always supports the weaker side. But he's always *found* on the stronger. Can you do that?'

'I just can, Mr. Falkland,' said Ursula. She began to wish John would come and talk to them. Their lively young wits and splendid spirits would soon undo her, if he did not. 'I am sure,' she said peaceably, 'Mr. Auberon is a very wonderful person.'

'He isn't, the least,' said Harold and Helena simultaneously. They disclaimed the epithet, eagerly as one must, of a friend.

Obviously, Ursula had put her foot in it,—but how was one to know? She had quite forgotten what it was like to be twenty years old. It was only Johnny who never forgot.

Later, after dinner, she made an excuse and left them.

It was really not to be borne. The result of the day's

wearing agitation, with its alternations of self-reproach and sharp resentment, was to make Ursula really cross,—it did not happen often. She was slow to anger, as to other emotions, and even when it moved within her, she could master it, as a rule. Now she felt a refreshing sparkle of real wrath ; she meant to get at him, scold him,—she would have liked to box his ears. His father had done that, and more, she knew, in his unmanageable youth, and Ursula had never doubted it had been exceedingly good for him. She had even said so, in public, among the Ingestres ; and Johnny's grandmother had approved the sentiment, and Johnny, being talked of, had pleasantly agreed. But he did not look at his father when he said it ; and he never made capital, for all his irreverent tongue, out of those tales of parental tyranny. If pressed, he generally implied that people in general, no names insisted on, were perfectly right in their attempts at discipline, and had had reason,—more than reason,—for the worst they did. It was only by talking to the men, the older keepers at the Hall, and noting how fiercely they roused on the subject, that his wife grew to suspect, by degrees, that what he represented as well-meaning but unprofitable measures to control him, on his father's part, had often been sheer violence and brutality.

Being launched on this line of irregular thought, she recollected another thing. As, huddled in a cloak, she walked rapidly down the familiar way towards the Lyke-wood, she remembered that, in the good quite early days of their marriage, when every possibility lay before, he had begged her to control his own temper, by any means she could manage, so that their child, when they had one, might never see him so. He implied that for a child to see a parent beyond himself,—really beyond, as any of his race might so easily be,—was a hateful thing in the child's later memory, an abiding nightmare to be avoided at all hazards, prevented by any means. It struck her then that he had never forgotten some of his father's black rages :

but she had dismissed the incident, and overlooked its occasion, since.

He looked at her as she entered the log-house with eyes that seemed to be shy,—she had that strange impression. She had never in her life seen John look so, though Helena had done so frequently.

‘Dinner?’ he said.

‘Dinner!’ ejaculated Ursula. ‘It’s half-past nine. You can have dinner if you like, but you won’t get it with us.’ This was her mood of rating,—it had a faintly improper effect upon her own ears, and she bethought herself. ‘Do you mean they didn’t tell you? Blandy had no orders? What on earth have they been doing?’

‘It isn’t his fault,’ said Johnny. ‘No one came down here. . . . Ursula, I say,—look there.’

He pushed the telegraph message towards her. Ursula, brought up short, stared down at it.

‘Good gracious!’ she said, and could not immediately say more. Then she drew it closer, and looked at the hour marked upon it. ‘You mean you’ve had it since four?’

‘Bit after four, wasn’t it? I was down there when it came. So was Blandy, of course, just after. He drove down to fetch me. That’s why.’

Ursula took it in. He had told the servant—not her! Then she mastered herself anew,—she needed it.

‘I’m very sorry,’ she said with propriety. ‘Poor Mother.’ Then she walked slowly away to the little hearth, and stood there, turning her back to him. So like him—all of it—so maddening, hopeless!—yet her tongue was tied. Once more he had worsted her completely. . . . Ten o’clock on Saturday night, and the funeral would be Tuesday,—yes, Tuesday at latest! The stupidity of men, even clever men, amazed her. Why could he never, for one instant, think of her?

‘I wish you had told me,’ she said in a carefully

moderate tone at last. 'I'm sorry, of course,—but it was very inconsiderate.'

'Inconsiderate?' said Johnny.

'Clothes.'

There was a pause. She had him,—clothes, to be sure.

'I say, I'm beastly sorry,' he said, rising to his feet. 'I'd no idea it was so late. Has the post gone? What's to-morrow?' He seized the calendar.

'Sunday, of course.' Luckily he felt it also: it was not nothing to him how his wife appeared, especially when she must, on so formal an occasion, hold a prominent place. The foremost, indeed: at such a season there would hardly be another Ingestre woman in reach of London. John felt it to such a degree, that he began to scheme for her immediately,—clever, rapid scheming,—likely to forestall Ursula's grievance, snatch it away from her altogether, unless she hastened to defend her dignity.

'But look here,—Sunday,' he broke out. 'You couldn't have in any case, could you? They wouldn't have got a letter, first,—and shops and so on,—can't purchase on Sunday, can you?—if it's purchasing you want.'

Ursula put him in his place as to what could be done, in the women's world, on Sunday; but it was little use. John would not stay in his place. He was not ignorant,—his ideas about clothes were wonderfully correct,—there were no blunders that she could take hold of, even there.

'Lucky for you I look forward,' she said, cutting him off. 'I can just manage, I think, as it happens, starting early on Monday. The heaviest things I got before I came north.'

'Did you?' said Johnny. She had them then,—that was all right. He sat down again frowning in his chair. Well, what did she make such a fuss for, then,—disturbing him?—just like her!

'Are you going?' he said, planting his elbows on the table, and playing with a pen.

'I'll get out in a moment,' said Ursula with intention. Her resentment was coming back. She had been shocked

out of it momentarily, but he seemed to feel his loss so little. After all, there was no reason why he should,—now. The thing had lasted long enough,—he had had time to get used to the idea of losing her. He was making the best of it,—Ursula had that thought. She was a little ashamed of it, but it came to her.

‘You might come and help me,’ she said, after an interval. ‘There’s young Falkland,—he’s a nice boy enough,—but still. . . . And they saw you, after all. You can’t get out of it,—pretend not to be here.’

‘No, I can’t pretend it,’ said Johnny, looking in front of him. ‘I might have managed—if I’d not gone to the station—purpose to rile you—mightn’t I?’

That had certainly been her thought; he picked it up complete as usual. He had himself chosen a situation that put him in the wrong either way, whether he entertained the guests, or held aloof from them, as he seemed more inclined to do. Ursula had got so far as to suppose that what he was considering was a question of etiquette. He did regard etiquette at times, generally when she least expected it. Further than that she would not look, it became altogether too confusing. She was tired of it. She could have no duty in the case, anyhow, the responsibility was his. Etiquette, of course, she knew about, and might even prompt him a little.

‘The girl will offer to go, at once, of course,’ she observed. ‘Her manners are all right. But I shall have to insist on their staying till Monday, all the same, considering the Sunday trains. I couldn’t let them go to the inn, either,—that’s impossible. They’re both, so to speak, in my charge.’

‘Why tell them at all, then?’ said Johnny. ‘No point in it. Only make them feel in the way.’

‘Would you really prefer that?’ said Ursula, turning to look at him sharply. He did not meet her eyes, gazing in front of him still. Did he not want the girl to go, then? And why, if he intended retirement? Swiftly all her jealousy and suspicion surged again.

'Oh, Lord, you must choose,' he said, breaking out unexpectedly and leaning back. His whole expressive face seemed to melt and change, took colour even. 'Can't you see? I can't do more than I'm doing,—it's on the cards I can't do that. You'll really have to play up, Ursula,—think a bit for yourself. I know at a pinch I've always done the thinking,—from the first,—but a man can't always, in this life. You're as old as I am, anyhow,—you might jolly well take your turn. . . . This is a pinch we'd not thought of,—you don't suppose I'd planned it, do you? Very well then, think for yourself.' He flung his books aside, clearing a space before him. 'And think for me a bit, if you're capable of it,' he added lower, 'and if you're not altogether lost to—to decency, think for her.'

There was a pause. 'Very well, I will not tell her anything, at least till to-morrow,' said Ursula,—kindly. Clearly, she intended to be kind. She added as she turned to go—'But I can't prevent her thinking it rather—odd.'

'Oh—Lord!' murmured Johnny. Planting his elbows on the cleared space on the table, he had dropped his head, as though in utter boredom, on his hands.

'I mean,' Ursula pushed on, 'I shall have to tell her something about you,—invent something,—what shall I—'

'Nothing,' he flashed, in a kind of horror, lifting his head. 'Invent,—you!—you're safe to make a mess of it. . . . Say nothing to her, for God's sake. Let her alone.'

Ursula said nothing to Helena. It was not hard to avoid confidence, since she did not care for her much, and only now and then, in rushes, felt amazingly small and mean under her eyes. She left it entirely till the Sunday, trusting the servants and people would be silent, and rather thinking, somehow, that they would. Silence, a cloak of silence, fell about Johnny. All his retainers, with one accord, formed the ring. That they knew, to the youngest of them, Ursula had little doubt,—anyhow, Blandy had been at the station.

Besides, messages and communications, by hand, rail or wire, rained on the house all day. Ursula was puzzled how so many people could have heard, but supposed it had been in the London extra editions. Everybody wrote to John,—his immense circle of friends, men and women, young and old, famous and the reverse, seemed to have been waiting for the chance. Ursula saw his father's writing, Jem Hertford's, young Lord Dering's: the remarkable hand of his mother's doctor, and the still more singular screed of Mr. Quarle, the brutal painter, who had produced the so-called portrait of her husband at the Hall: Violet, of course, the eternally youthful Mrs. Clewer, Lady Ruabon, who at forty-five made no secret of her devotion to him, and Barbara Weyburn, a girl of twenty-one. Even the Mitchell woman,—even poor old Miss Darcy,—she recognised them all before Blandy, deft and silent, swept them up and carried them out of sight. All those people thought it was a special occasion to commiserate, evidently: John's own father did,—she was a little astonished he should write. But then there were directions to be given, no doubt,—times and places for the ceremony,—things Ursula also needed to know. But she dared not go to the Lyke-wood house again: even her cold courage failed her. She waited, expecting him to turn up, to stroll in any time, having thought better of it: having decided, all the same, to amuse himself with a pretty girl, as it had always been his strict habit to do, till now. Why, his duties as host to a man she had never known him fail at any point, till now. John's hospitality was part of him, she had always counted on it without a thought,—even counted on his relieving her of many of her just duties. But no sign, no sound: it might have been his corpse—the thought came to her once, crossing near the entrance to the wood—that lay down there.

Towards the end of the afternoon, she took her resolution, and told Harold, not Helena. She found it easier.

Harold was shocked. Really, the children had excellent manners, considering all things,—their mother, for instance. Harold put his sympathy in the neatest and lightest form possible, for Mrs. Ingestre's ear—exactly fitted to Ursula's degree of grief, as it happened : and asked to be allowed to tell his sister on the spot, so that they might move to the inn.

' Please don't trouble, Mr. Falkland,' said Ursula. After a few more well-chosen speeches, she added, ' It's quite a consolation, in a way, to have you : especially your sister,—she's so sweet.'

Well, so she was. That was not pure invention, lying,—really it was not. There was something in her manner and appearance, her tranquil little way of occupying herself about the Routhwick rooms, her friendship with John's dogs, her easy enjoyment of everything, the country above all,—that soothed Ursula's sore and embittered feelings. No one could be rude or peevish to Helena, anyhow, however one might wish her away. It was not a question of appearance either, it was apart from it, just behind her appearance as it were. But even her good looks Ursula admitted, quite readily, as she had always done, even to John. Her eyes, which seemed always to be watching, drooping to pensiveness, or levelled intent, were the blue-grey Rossetti dreamed of. The constant breezes and draughts of the place—even Ursula was ' rough-haired ' at Routhwick—ruffled all her little gold-dust curls. The pearl-tints of her skin seemed to have gained, rather than lost, by three weeks' reckless exposure to rain and wind. Three weeks of sun, Mrs. Ingestre privately decided, would have freckled her ; but then, as Helena had been driven to grant, smiling, that walking party in the Lake District had had ' practically ' no sun at all.

' I say, Helena,' said Harold. ' Ingestre's lost his mother,—did you know ? '

He had taken her arm, just for safety, as he came up to where she stood, beside the long flower-bed in the kitchen-garden.

Routhwick territory, it should be said, was chiefly kitchen-garden. Ursula had again and again impressed upon John, since he had to be there so often, the desirability of 'laying out' the place, so as to bring it at least into tolerable rivalry with the Hall. Nothing was really wanting to do it,—certainly not money in John's pocket, nor time on his hands: nor taste, if one came to that, nor soil, nor even climate, since the huddled and gnarled trees of the Lyke-wood, curled into grotesque deformity by centuries of western gales, successfully protected the home demesne. But John only laughed, and told her to let Routhwick alone, it was better as it was: it had always been like that. Granted the kitchen was the best room in the house, and carrots and cabbages the principal products of its terraces. But the kitchen was ripping—no other word for it: and carrots and cabbages, if Ursula took the trouble to look at them, were jolly nice things. Quite as delicate, the one, as the rotten maidenheads in the greenhouse called his mother's at the Hall: and a long way more beautiful, the other, than his father's everlasting orchids. And if she would go and look at one purple cabbage he had in mind—latitude and longitude carefully provided—she would see.

For all that, the long flower-border in the walled garden was beautiful, in September above all. They were the range of colours that before all others Johnny adored, those early autumn shades. Late summer, they were of course, at Routhwick: everything there was late. There were even tall lilies still, of some late-flowering species, taller than any Helena had ever seen: pallid pillars of greenish-white, among the revel of pinks and purples, orange-tawny and delicate mauve. She could almost look into the white lilies' faces,—with a little stoop she really could.

She was so stooping when Harold came to her, but he drew her upright. He knew, good brother that he was, that the thing was serious, or might be so for her. That was why he came to her promptly, no delay. He could not

deceive himself, like Ursula, though he would have been just as glad as Ursula to be deceived.

And she winced at his words,—she drew back her beautiful head and shut her eyes as that truth, already half-divined, went home. Just like the lilies, she was at that moment, and pale as they. She could not have turned much paler, she had been beating her brains against circumstance, the last twelve hours, too much.

‘All right, dear,’ she said. ‘We must go, of course. Have you packed?’

‘I told her so,—she won’t have it,’ said Harold. ‘She puts me off with talking, every time. But I’ll make her,’ he added deliberately, ‘if you want.’

Want? What did she want? What—it was inevitable—did he want her to do? Her thoughts, the winged shadow-thoughts of youth, swept the whole horizon, flickered over the whole heaven of feeling, during the few frightened minutes while she took it in.

First, and strangely, the conviction crossed her that it was over, all over, finished for her: that his mother’s noble spirit had chosen this fashion to banish her utterly, knowing that by her approach, by her existence even, she was causing him suffering, doing him harm. It was the conviction of being completely cut off, crushed like a leaf by the calamity that had wounded him, that had turned Helena white. She could do nothing,—nothing. She counted for nothing to all eternity. All was at an end.

Then, her mortal womanhood revolted, gave it the lie. How could she not serve, since he wanted her? His eyes had already informed her of that, and now—how much more! The sure instinct to help came with the sure divination of his greater need. Whither could this new star she followed, this later duty, the truth for which he once had blessed her, lead but to his side?

The strife of new right and old right for the moment in the girl was frightful, seemed to clutch at the very foundations of her life. Then character triumphed, as character

always does, and her sweet serenity flowed back. Nothing mattered, nothing could go really wrong, since he was there.

Where he was, Helena knew with a natural understanding that would have put Ursula to shame. True as a dog's eyes, hers had turned, as soon as her brother informed her, in the direction of the Lyke-wood house. Where should he be, in the wide domain of Routhwick, but there, in the spot where his mother's spirit, and the spirit of his own childhood, permanently dwelt?

Helena knew all about that little camp of his, though she had never seen it. She knew the books on which it had been founded, as well. A log-house, with a pine-wood stockade, loopholes in the logwalls, even a private well of water,—what happy English child does not know those things by heart? Child as she was still in mind, Helena had longed, in sheer joyful curiosity, to see it, ask him about it, hear him explain its curious defences to her,—with his hand under her bent arm as she stood close to him,—all in mightily solemn jest. He had been used to entrench himself there in youth, so he had informed her: once, with his mother's hardly-wrung permission, for the whole of a summer night. John, aged twelve, had held the log-house, she could guess with what breathless delight, from dusk to dawn: against imaginary enemies, truly, but what was that? It remained his own place, by the lasting right of childhood: and it was necessary for his own people, who came there in the true spirit, to look at it through his eyes.

Well then, being there, he would show her the rest as well. She had but to let him lead, watch him and follow: his leading could not be wrong. And first and foremost, said all the Falkland instincts, she must not run away.

Helena, having drawn breath, and stated her decision, looked at Harold. Harold, of course, was steadily gazing away.

'Ingestre's in London, probably,' he said with a fixed gravity. 'She didn't say so,—takes for granted we should

understand. So I did, of course. It's natural he should forget everything in the circumstances,—things like us, I mean.'

'Yes, dear,' said Helena, and kissed him. She did not often do that.

Rescue!—thought Harold: if Auberon would only come! He had a mind to telegraph to Auberon, if only for counsel and consolation. He might come alongside anyhow, back Harold up. Then anew, glancing at his sister's pale face, he had to abandon the idea.

Instead, Harold took her arm in a comforting manner.

'Now come a walk with me up that hill,' he suggested. 'It's a good hill, and we've not been there. The chances are we see Ingleborough from the top. If you don't come now, Mrs. Ingestre will catch us for church, and that——'

Helena agreed with him. Church was not what she wanted, either. And—well—anyhow she had been there in the morning, that was once.

IV

The first night was bad, for Johnny: the second night was worse. He all but gave way, at one frightful moment of suffering, towards ten o'clock.

His trouble was, that one word would call her to him. He knew that. The word was written on a scrap of paper before him, and he had but to send it, by any one of his innumerable trusted hands. The service that Johnny had earned by sane command was true service: they would none of them blame him, his men, nor would they talk. A breath would bring her to him, the breath of his royal wish. So near, so easy,—so utterly beyond his reach.

He could not doubt she would come, eyes closed, he had never doubted it. Doubt was a wrong to her, in his view. And once there, at his side, under his eyes,—he need not look beyond. Sufficient for the golden moment, that would

be : all-sufficient for eternity, surely. He lifted his eyes to his mother's face on the wall. She would not reproach him now. How could she ? She had only seen half, on earth, as the best women can only see. She knew more now,—why, she had guessed it previously. She must have guessed, being his mother, a man's mother. Now she knew the other half presumably,—she had at least deserved it, by her valiant life. It was a cruel thing, the battle on earth of man and woman,—it was not a fair thing, for either, such pain, such deception in one another constantly, even the best. Mother and son, father and daughter, husband and wife,—but not when a man and woman really loved. That was the exception, the truce granted by the gods. He had come near to an equal understanding with his mother,—well, he and Helena could complete that perfect round. The divine right of love was theirs. He alone had enough, quite enough, to float that little girl's world away, carry it to the safe harbour where he would place her, his prize, his golden fleece, beyond the harming of the crowd.

Could he ? Could he save her ? That was what they had all found so hard. He looked at the pile of his writing on the table : that ancestor of his, in whose personality he had immersed himself willingly, had had some of these feelings too. He had suffered one tremendous tide of passion, rising very clearly to his descendant's eyes in those ancient crabbed letters, which had broken against the walls of convention, breached them as the raging Mule had breached the bridge. And what had happened later ? Well, the raging tide had sunk again, and a thousand hands had patiently rebuilt the barrier, calling upon their various gods or idols to bless the work.

Traitors,—his enemies,—how he loathed them all.

He looked down at the Maréchale's portrait, and his face softened slightly, for he thought of Violet at once : he always did, seeing that painting. Something in the turn of head and neck was like her, some flicker of quaint character persisting in the lashes and the lips. He gave

her a kindly thought, hoped she would get through, before he recurred to his ancestor and the origin of the picture again. He read through some of the pages of his chronicle—fair, he trusted he had been fair. The woman was probably not worth one tithe of the feeling that had been spent on her,—only he had no means of knowing the other side. Her letters, though her remarks were often quoted and referred to, were missing from his *bordereau*. Perhaps,—he half smiled at the thought,—she could not write. She was a little nobody, in origin, only she made men mad about her, she had that gift. Helena, thank Heaven, was not that sort. She did not keep her distance, and smile across her shoulder, tempting those who passed. She met you fully, fairly,—and modestly. Few girls could find that happy mean. But no girl had ever matched her. Helena was divine.

So young too. Young, and his youth was going. He felt it slipping from him in these wearing nights of pain. His chance was going with her, his last chance. For he could never look at a second-best after her, that Johnny knew would be impossible. She staled all others of her kind, so extraordinarily. If he ever felt himself slipping, he must slay himself, surely, sooner than that. His mother would grant him licence there to break his word. He knew his own weaknesses, and the weaknesses of his race as well. But he had been privileged by his artist-birth to know the best, meet it before his own best manhood had weakened; and since it had been so granted him, he must never get beyond it. That was why he met the grinding torment of these two nights open-armed. Let it come, since it was in her honour, all of it: sear him, scar him, mark him as hers alone. And let him never lose those marks while he lived, nor beyond death, he trusted.

Ursula he never thought of,—for the time he let her be. Ursula and Helena, one could not look at both of them, it was useless. Young and glorious and kind, consoling, condescending,—yes, comprehending in every look and

accent : softening when he softened, smiling when he smiled, shadowing to his gravity, ringing true to every testing touch,—except that he had long stopped testing, since he knew her : that was Helena,—Rosalind, it was the same. Rosalind to his senses she had always been. Perhaps she existed because that crabbed old Shakespeare had first conceived her. Or else she had always existed, that was better still. She was a spirit, a light of the earth, the English earth,—ah, no, she was not ! She was no spirit,—infinitely better, a beautiful warm frame of girlhood. . . . Useless, he could not do it : he must give in.

He did not give in : the summoning word was never sent. Perhaps he knew in his heart the whole time he could not send it ; that his treasure was sealed. He wore through the weary hours to midnight somehow. Towards midnight, he took his pen again, and wrote on rather dreamily, a little chapter. It might or might not go into the book,—he thought it was truth in its way,—Violet would tell him if he asked. Her judgment was sufficient, and she was a woman, luckily ;—though of course it was always possible that the stuff he wrote at midnight would not bear the light of day. She—Helena—would not read the book,—she never read books like this. He did not want her to, specially : unless some day when he was dead, when she was old, a grandmother,—then she might be allowed, perhaps. Her—well, her husband could decide.

He stopped writing of a sudden, lifted his head, and sat motionless. His quick ear had caught a sound. He heard, or thought he heard, the clink of the little iron gate which, at the wood's outer extremity, gave upon the road. He sat, every sense on the alert. There was a step, no doubt of it, approaching rather cautiously through the wood.

It was after twelve, and he had no dogs with him : but Johnny was not easily deranged, in life, and rather welcomed occurrences ; more especially at this moment, being heartily sick of his own company. Anything, even a poaching tramp, was better than that. A pirate would

have been far better. His namesake Silver with the timber leg would have been received, cutlass and all, with enthusiasm. But there was small hope of it. Caution, even extreme caution, in coming through the Lyke-wood, did not necessarily imply an evil-doer, it was imposed by the Lyke-wood's peculiarities upon the simplest citizen. To-night there was a moon, Johnny believed : he had not looked out to see, being otherwise occupied. But a moon made the place worse, if anything, since the shadows of the branches imitated the roots of the trees. Further, the immediate defences of the log-house, contrived when John was twelve years old, but not quite devoid of the subtlety of his maturer genius, though now a little decayed and overgrown, made the approach to his camp, as he would have said, ' no fun.' It was not only visionary pirates who might easily get a broken head or ankle for their pains. Taking all things together, having listened a minute, the master of the log-house rose, and lamp in hand, went to the door to throw light on the situation.

In the period of his great-grandfather's great-uncle, this would have been distinctly a rash proceeding, since any lurking enemy or rival could have shot him, full-lighted, where he stood at the door. But Johnny rather thought, for the moment, no one would be kind enough to shoot him : that was a little too much to ask. He held the lamp high, frowning into the obscurity.

' Who's there ? ' he challenged, in his low carrying tone, —what Fanny called his ' pretty ' voice, which could have been heard with ease to the wood's other extremity. ' Speak up, whoever you are, or else clear out.'

' Thanks,' said a rather tired voice out of the furthest gloom : no more.

John's strained face under the lamp-light changed oddly, —anyone would have said to pure relief. Likewise his manner changed, on the instant, though he pitched his voice to carry still.

' Stretto,' he politely addressed a shadowy broad-

shouldered form, just visible against the faint light of the sky in the wood's opening. 'By which I mean, look out for the stockade. That's the entrance where I'm lighting,—catch on the inner side of the gatepost,—got it?—good. Now come straight up the track I'm making, and you'll be clear of the snags, not to say snares. They're tolerably guileful, some of them, though I say it that should not.' He watched his visitor past the last defences before he spoke again, in his ordinary careless voice. 'Not but what I was expecting you, generally speaking. Only not just at midnight—my mistake.'

He lowered his lamp-torch on the words, and Quentin, slightly smiling, came into the illuminated ring.

'Thanks,' he said simply again. 'You seem to be well defended in these parts. I'd begun to think I'd got wrong, since I asked for Routhwick. The people at the inn said I should find you, though, so I chanced it, and risked the short cut. Fact is, I've had a fair day of it, first and last. Can I come in?'

Quentin did not mention that the people at the inn had told him he would find Mr. John in a singular manner, as though Mr. John were something fine and precious, his presence on the parental estate a secret to be withheld, and his person at all costs shielded from the profane. Quentin, not having heard of Mrs. Ingestre's death, had laid it to the habitual Yorkshire caution,—one never got a question answered here without reservation, and a certain suspicion of the questioner as well. Beyond that, he was not inquisitive, and had been too tired to trouble about the matter. He had, of course, by some means to see Ingestre.

Now, here he was, much as usual, with no especially alarming attributes of dignity,—not even dressed,—and what was far better, with no women about him. To get at Ingestre without having to fight past Mrs. Ingestre and a flock of ladies was almost more than Quentin had hoped, shooting him thus at random, as he had been practically

obliged on a Sunday to do. He would have faced any number of pirates, like Johnny, sooner than the civilities of a country-house drawing-room to-night. He had come up late on the chance, trusting the ladies of the house would be in bed, but one never knew. He had been enabled, during the latter part of his day's work, to make a fair shot at the Routhwick influence, not to say the Routhwick revenue; and he could hardly gauge, with his limited experience of smart society, what the corresponding Routhwick habits might not be. He was prepared for anything.

Now, glancing about the quaint little quarters, so eccentrically guarded, to which John introduced him,—the white wood walls, the smoke in the air, the skins on the floor, the confusion of books and papers on the table, not a whiff of femininity anywhere to be detected,—his relief was the greater. Relief spoke in his face as clearly as in Johnny's. They were both purely thankful to find one another, to join forces over a problem that had become too much for either singly: and the eyes of both, when they met in the fuller light, declared it.

'This is Routhwick, more or less,' said John. 'It's my department. Sit down.' He swung a basket-chair round in front of the fire. It was ages since he had had a guest at the log-house, but luckily there was a chair. He was propelling the guest with one hand towards it, when he withdrew the hand with an exclamation. 'I say,—you're wet.'

'I'm beastly sorry,' said Quentin. 'Shall I spoil your things? I came across the stream.'

'What?' gasped Johnny.

'Forded it—last night,—excuse me.' He dropped into the chair, leaning back.

After an interval John, who still held the lamp, implanted it carefully. 'You forded the Mule?' he repeated. 'You couldn't.'

'I did, somehow: don't ask. It was not a first-class exhibition. The water's gone down a bit, and I found an

easy place. I was washed down a bit in the deepest part, but as you see, I wasn't drowned.'

'Where?' said Johnny.

'Not far from here.' Being close pressed, Quentin told him exactly where, and it was the only possible place for miles, both ways. Consequently, Quentin was not 'having him on,' but stating fact. At least, unless he were a very, very accomplished liar, with which talent, somehow, Johnny did not credit him.

'I've been knocking about since,' he added to his description, brushing some of the Lyke-wood mosses off his sleeve, 'and I stuck at the inn for a time, so I dried. No harm in a fire, though.' This last was a tribute to Johnny's camp-grate, which his eyes profoundly approved.

'Why?' said Johnny. He subsided into his own chair, to attend.

'Why I forded it? Because I had to. I came across country from Kendal this morning, you see; and having the map, I didn't enquire. I'd better have enquired, for the map deluded me. There was a road all right,—but there wasn't a bridge.'

'No,' said Johnny. 'There's not been for forty-eight hours. But you—er—might have gone round.'

'I hate going round,' said Quentin. 'I'm sick of it.' He leant to the fire, elbow on knee.

'So do I,' his host admitted. He recollected his own feat of audacity, which had startled Ursula, and had to admit he was beaten. This was better,—it was even jolly good. And on top of a walk from Kendal, five-and-twenty—thirty miles, it must be that. He tried to reckon, but his eyes were on the boy. It needed an explanation, a human explanation, above and beyond mere recklessness and record-breaking. He examined Quentin curiously and cautiously.

'Great Scott,' he commented privately, 'what a rage the man was in!'

And he had been, obviously: he saw the embers of it,

even now. He had been furious with that lame girl, for putting him in the wrong so completely. Well, so he ought to be,—most healthy and natural,—Johnny admired it. Granted the man's unheard-of situation,—always supposing the tragedy the journal hinted at were a fact,—Johnny would have felt, or tried to feel, the same. He would not have forded the Mule in September, though,—he would have stopped at that. But then, *he* knew the Mule's tricks,—Quentin did not. He was foolhardy and rough-haired, and took such risks in ignorance. Silly young ass !

Johnny got up after an interval, and went to a cupboard. 'Here, drink this,' he directed. 'My department can rise to whisky, anyhow. You must be—er—pretty tired.'

'I'm all right,' said Quentin : but he drank it. He also sat for some time silent by the fire, his host taking stock of him with constantly renewed interest, his fine limbs, splendid shoulders, the shape of his bent head. He might not know the complete case for tragedy John was withholding, but he suspected it,—part of it,—oh yes ! The attitude reminded him of some statue, one of the innumerable exhausted runners, or stricken warriors, of Greek art. . . . Young huntsman, not captured yet ! He would not be, if he could help it. He was fighting the toils, the fine invisible meshes thrown after him, almost visibly. He was indignant, still, that any had dared approach. That was why he had burst through the stream. He had the water, the woodland green, still on him. . . . Johnny's mind ran back to the classics, to antiquity. They were needed, somehow, in the case.

'Jolly good thing you're not dead,' moralised Johnny, having thought it over, by degrees, with the aid of his eyes. 'Isn't it ?'

'It might be argued,' said Quentin, moving.

'Think they'd have missed you ?'

'My people, you mean ? Not for some time,—they're some way off.'

'I mean your—er—superiors. Your natural directors. All the people you habitually obey.'

Quentin paused,—a good pause. 'At the Office? Oh—no. I might have been missed for forty-eight hours, till the other fellow learnt his work. I don't suppose they'd have bothered to drag the stream for me.' He added after a short pause,—'That's what you've been engaged in, isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Johnny. 'Dash!' he added privately. This was exactly what he had intended Auberon not to know. There was no object in his knowing,—at present. There might never be. 'Think it's a work of supererogation?' he said aloud.

'Oh no,' said Quentin. 'It's better to be on the lookout.' He resumed his stricken hunter's pose above the fire.

A bit down-hearted, evidently. Johnny wondered what he had been learning, since he got across the stream. He was abominably acute, no doubt of it. He had never met so incisive an intelligence. It seemed to strike out from every look and word, though he was sparing, by nature, of both. Luckily, John's people on the estate were sparing of words as well; they did not like talk much, both by their own nature and his training,—knew they had better not.

'You've been over my tracks, then,' he said easily. 'Seen Fox?'

'I talked a bit to him,' said Quentin, 'and one or two of the farmers.'

Johnny's dark brows met. Fox would not have a happy life, if he had been gossiping. Johnny led his assistant on the estate a life at all times, which probably made him sigh for the serenity of a Better Land; but he would cease to find any interest in existence at all, if he had been betraying Johnny's confidence.

'May I ask,' he said politely, 'when the deuce you found the time? I can't fit it into the day's work from Kendal, somehow.'

'Only this last hour or two,' said Quentin. 'Chiefly

when I stuck at the inn. I couldn't do much till I had seen you, naturally.'

'Ah,—and you put off trying to see me,—till now.'

'I did, that's the fact. You see, earlier on, I thought you couldn't be got at. Couldn't make out what they were driving at, down there. I nearly settled not to try it, till the morning. It's just their way of talking put me off.'

There was apology perceptible in the rough-haired visitor's tone. After all, one could not tell Ingestre the secondary reason, or *arrière-pensée*, had been to avoid his wife. It is possible John divined the secondary reason in the silence that succeeded,—since he had once or twice noticed Auberon forbear, with Ursula. Auberon had a manner of forbearance which was slightly conspicuous to the irreverent outside eye. Johnny had had to suffer it once or twice himself. When he did answer, it was slowly.

'They're a good lot,' he said, 'about these parts,—extraordinarily faithful. They've a name for fidelity, but it is a fact. What they were driving at, and failed to say, was that my mother died in London on Saturday. She was fairly well known here, some time back, and it was feeling for her—as much as me—accounts for their way of talking.'

The basket chair creaked as Quentin rose. It was a good rise, too,—all in one piece, for all his weariness. The soldier in him, deep-rooted, showed at that instant.

'I'm sorry, Ingestre,—I'd no notion. I've not seen the paper for days. I say, why the deuce didn't you turn me out? Crowding you up like this.'

'Because I didn't want to. I like to be crowded. You sit down.' John turned, and their eyes battled a moment; then the visitor subsided slowly into his seat again.

'I could go to the house,' he reasoned. 'Mrs. Ingestre—'

'Mrs. Ingestre's in bed,—what d'you take her for? She goes to bed sharp at ten in the country, like all decent people,—making up the season, four hours a night. What did you come at such a time for, if you didn't mean to sleep with me?'

'Here?' Quentin was taken aback. 'But I say,'—he looked round him,—'you haven't a bed.'

'There's a bed,' said Johnny.

Quentin looked at it. 'That's yours.'

'I'm not using it.'

Quentin waited anew, to take it in. His host was a remarkable person. But then he had gathered that, in the course of his late investigations. All the fellows he had come across spoke of Ingestre in the same—what one might call—provisional manner; true, that is, for the time being, but liable to be upset by some unforeseen outbreak in their subject the following day. At present, as it appeared, Ingestre was not sleeping anywhere, according to himself.

'I've taken a bed at the inn,' he remarked gently, having glanced round him once.

For some reason, this innocent remark proved exasperating. Mr. Ingestre had been sitting with one elbow on the table, smoking in elegant ease. Now he swung his chair round to face Quentin, removed his cigarette, and said in succession several offensive things. He seemed excited. The argument appeared to be—so far as there was an argument—that since Ingestre had put himself out for three days past to do Quentin's work, and had spent goodness knew how much money and worry in the process, Quentin himself was necessarily attached to Routhwick from the moment when he set foot on the premises; and, equally from that moment, under its protection—and its direction too.

It was on the last point, needless to say, that Quentin differed. He did not mind being protected, he could stand that. Johnny asked him if he *saw*, during his discourse, several times, but that point he failed to see. Johnny said they might do things differently at the Board of Trade—Quentin corrected him—but hereabouts things were like that,—they always had been. Quentin was hampered by laughter, rather, but he put his own views competently, all the same.

'It's my concern,' he contended, 'ours anyhow. You've no right to bother with it at all, really.'

'I've the best right,' said Johnny. 'Morally speaking, it was my concern as much as yours. More so.' He proceeded to demonstrate this. 'I ask you to look at that bit of writing I sent you.' (This was the summary of the evidence that exculpated Jill, contained on the last page of her journal, which Quentin had been allowed to see.) 'Well now,—which of us was wrong?' said Johnny.

'I was,' said Quentin haughtily.

'Only because I was,' Johnny pointed out. 'I wrote you out my ideas,—in a railway-carriage,—I remember doing it. Well, what did you do? You merely acted on them!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Quentin.

'You did,' said Johnny. 'And they were wrong ideas. See?'

'You're mistaken,' said Quentin. 'What I acted on was my own observation.'

'And what's the good of that?' said Johnny. 'You don't know what to look out for. Good Lord,—*your* observations of that kid finished where mine began.' The discussion was pursued on these lines until—the visitor being unfairly handicapped by politeness,—Johnny proved to his own satisfaction that, morally speaking, in the matter of Miss Jacoby, he had the pull over Auberon, first and last. Then—

'Speaking less than morally——' said Quentin.

'What's that?' said Johnny. 'I say, you've done enough thinking for the present, strikes me. You get to bed.'

The boy had blushed. 'No, really, I'm serious. I retain responsibility, Ingestre, I'm afraid.'

There was a pause. 'Meaning the kid threw herself at your head?' asked Johnny.

Quentin had a visible shock. 'You knew?'

'I—er—divined it. So did old Darcy. So did my wife, very probably.' Johnny considered how many lies he had

better tell. 'That makes no difference,' he explained for Quentin's consolation. 'It's just a little way they have.'

The guest was silent, looking tired. His arm lay along the chair-arm, since he was resting: but his hand at the extremity of it was closely clenched.

'I assure you,' said Johnny, still with the kind idea of consoling him, 'it's simply incidental to the kind of thing. It—er—always happens: that is, constantly. *You* couldn't have stopped her.' He considered. 'Not with any number of blue-books, you couldn't. Some one else might have, of course. I might, if I'd known you——'

Quentin broke in. 'Drop it, at least till we find her,' he said.

'Right,' said Johnny. He was serious for several minutes, excessively. It was a serious matter,—might be, after all. Only——

'You mean to tell me,' he tried again very gravely after the interval, 'you think you could have helped it?'

The boy was rigid and motionless, teeth set, without a doubt, though his head was slightly turned away,—and that expressive hand clenched on the chair-arm. He was really one of the completest things of his kind John had ever come across: all of a piece within as without. And after all, it was no fun for him.

Johnny speculated on his guest for a time, leaning back in his chair, his eyes at their widest through his rings of cigarette smoke, except when the smoke reached them, when they narrowed up. He tried, hard, to capture the point of view. Never in his life had he had so much difficulty: but he did, for some moments, accomplish it. Still, his natural man protested. Conscience, of course, was a fine thing, but you can overdo it, for the just balance of life. What you may call a sense of proportion is necessary. To go back, as this man was probably doing, and painfully re-track every step of one's acquaintance with a girl—it was true he had done it himself by Ursula lately, in the train coming north. But not with the same purpose,

precisely. Not impelled by conscience, exclusively, and his duty to the state. Not with the entire weight of his Imperial responsibilities, the future of society, the development of the species,—what England expects.—Useless: the whole of the humour John had taken pains to exclude from the serious situation, came crowding back into it, in his thoughts, and visible in his eyes. The rest of his features he kept with an effort, but he could have been observed keeping them. It was a strain.

As a matter of fact, Quentin could hardly have fallen into kinder hands, in a position which exposed him to the common scoffer; simply because John's genius was not that of humour, but comedy: a far broader and more benevolent thing.

'You go to bed,' he said decidedly, at last.

Quentin stirred. 'I can't take your bed, Ingestre, really,' he protested.

'I tell you, I don't want it. I'm going out soon.'

He spoke with finality, and rose as he spoke; so Quentin had to take him at his word. But he made one more effort.

'Not about my business, I say,' he said, looking up with a certain shy earnestness,—nice at his age. Johnny approved of it. He shot him a friendly spark in response.

'No,' he said, 'about my own.' He added, after an interval of strolling about—'For want of better—in life. See?'

'No,' said Quentin.

'Well then, take your boots off,' said Johnny, with a happy thought. 'You don't know much. You can tell them at the Board of Agriculture I said so. Got everything you want?' he added, looking round him.

'Yes,' said Quentin serenely, without stirring. He was thinking deeply.

'Ingestre.'

'Well?'

'Helena—Miss Falkland—I suppose she's gone home.'

'No, she's still there at the house.' What—in the name

of the eternal—John was momentarily transfixed. Being so frozen, he spoke in a still, soft voice. 'Why should she have?' he ejaculated in sudden indignation, his colour rising. 'It's Sunday to-day, isn't it? Saturday to Sunday's not a week-end.'

'No,' said Quentin. 'Only I thought—your mother——'

'Ah, just so.' John mastered himself. 'Well, she hasn't. At least, I think she hasn't. I understood from Ursula on—er—whichever day it was, she didn't mean her to, anyhow. What I mean is, if she had, chances are I should have known. With any luck,' said Johnny, 'you'll see her to-morrow,—er—get a good chance at her. We're going south.'

'Thanks,' said Quentin peacefully. Young cub!

'If you don't want to,—mention it,' said Johnny, turning on him suddenly in a nasty manner.

'I do, thanks. It's all right. . . . Don't bother about me,' added Quentin politely. 'You've got your writing. I shall be all right.'

On consideration, John did so,—that is, retreated to his writing,—and it was about time. Few young men, so highly skilled in various deception as Johnny, could have given themselves away so completely, as he during those last few responses. He could not help it. Do what he would he flushed, flashed, stirred to his depths at the mere mention of that name. Nobody was to take it on their lips in his presence, that lovely name of hers,—another man above all. He was a flame on the instant, a flaming sword,—he was a tiger, with lowering eyes, patrolling softly about Helena's temple, and swinging his tail. Johnny became a tiger easily—it was the thing he did best: perhaps he had it not so far behind him. Having moved about and eyed Quentin from several points of view,—all unfavourable,—he patrolled to his table and sat down, dropping himself sulkily into his chair and trimming his light. Teach him to talk about her,—said Johnny's expression,—mention her like that—as if she had been

anybody, or anything to do with him ! He chucked his books about a little, and then settled down to his writing, exceedingly still.

Mr. Auberon, thus left abruptly to his own devices, felt at ease, for all his somewhat unusual treatment. John's celebrated method of hospitality was simple,—or rather, it was threefold. He always took for granted people liked him, to begin with,—which had the odd effect, as a rule, of making them do so. He said everything he wanted to them, for just so long as he felt inclined. When he had had enough of it, he left them to themselves, with a supply of good tobacco. The plan was only applicable to men, of course : at least, the last part of it : the rest was, after all, much the same for the two sexes. He had found it answer to such an extent, that rather too many people liked him in the world. Witness the formidable pile of their letters on his writing-table, of which only a bare half-dozen, and those the easiest, were replied to as yet.

Quentin responded to the treatment as others had done. He felt, for all his day's wear and tear of body and mind, comforted, supported,—really entertained. He was also beginning, he believed, to get the hang of Ingestre, though it was hard to keep on steady lines with him, he put one out so deliberately. It was some time since he had stopped regarding him as a 'waster,' which had been his original impulse, during the conversation in John's house, in which they compared their political views. Of late, chiefly owing to his clever letters, his opinion of him had gone up by leaps and bounds. After all, a man's own letters are evidence. Right into the midst of this growing appreciation, came Falkland's confidence on the hill-tops concerning his sister ; and Quentin felt bound, as the Falklands' friend, to think of him with temporary disgust,—though curiosity. He was already interested enough, in a personal manner, to be curious.

Then there was the recent business of the hunt for the

missing girl,—the other girl. There could be no further question, after Quentin's late researches in John's neighbourhood, that he was generous,—any more than that he was able,—and domineering. Obviously, in that matter, he had poured forth money like water, and bully-ragged the whole of the country-side. It did not need Quentin's detective talent to discover that. There was hardly a man, official or otherwise, within the radius his researches had covered, who did not cringe at the mere mention of his distinguished name.

Quentin the improver said 'feudal' at first to this, with all the disparagement that word conveys in the modern mouth; but as he worked back to the house that was the centre of the feudal ring, he detected something that was not feudality in the attitude of the country-folk towards the family,—that is, to the son. There was friendliness, fatherliness even, in the old farmers' manner, and an active partisanship about the farmers' wives. Fox the agent, a down-looking, coarse-made man, with whom Quentin had spoken passingly, was under young Ingestre's thumb. He spoke with an ill-bred accent, but a reticence of good breeding that was certainly imposed on him from above. More, he let no word of complaint or criticism escape him, though he had the chance, more than once. It was true he called Johnny a 'young viper' at one point, but the term seemed dropped in pure admiration of his soft and deadly methods, employed against a firm of London contractors who had tried to 'do' him over fitting out one of the model farms. Generally speaking, Quentin gathered that Ingestre got his money's worth out of everybody who worked for him, and just a little bit extra as well. Something that 'feudality' alone cannot account for, with whatever virtuous and unassailable sentiments feudality may be bound up.

Very well: then there was this matter of Miss Falkland—Helena: that was harder by far. It was so hard, considering the leap of the unconquerable fires in John's

splendid eyes lately, that Quentin flinched from it shyly, and, for the moment, turned to something else.

He took in his surroundings, which were extremely nice, and exactly suited him. Complete, as well; all the materials for the so-called simple life were there, though some of them were not exactly simple. Certain details—the silver lamp at Ingestre's right hand, the porcelain cup to his left, the fine linen on the low camp-bed, the yet finer tobacco Mr. Auberón was enjoying during his reflections,—seemed borrowed or imported from a more elaborate life beyond.

It was a mere *dépendance*, this châlet, to use the dear Swiss term: yet the man was living in it, no doubt of that. Nor was he cut off completely, as the 'pukka' hermit should be, for he was being well served. Quentin knew far too much about camps and their unlovely make-shifts not to be rapidly convinced of that. Whatever his design in self-seclusion might be, a trained servant was involved in it,—only that made the situation odder, if anything. And he wrote by night,—and walked at dawn,—and slept by day, presumably. Was that the latest mode of 'making up the season,' Quentin wondered, for the selecter sections of London society?

Then he dropped external investigation, and his thoughts took wing again,—to the women. It was time. First to his own distant mother, whom Quentin kept secret, like all his best possessions, and before the picture of whom, held steadily in mind for a moment, he saluted Ingestre's grief. That was all right at least, no trickery. Then, by no devious course, to Falkland's sister, whom already, unthinking, he embraced among his best possessions too. He had her friendship. He had come to know her lately, really know her, in the airy echoing solitudes of the mountain-sides. He liked Helena, admired,—and trusted her. That faith he had expressed to her brother had been no mere form of words. He believed in her loyalty, honesty, and good sense as he had not yet believed in woman—girl

rather,—but he made the necessary allowances. Helena was young, and she was tender-hearted. She had been fascinated, caught by the man. Deliberately or no on his part, he had captured her. Well, everything was already for him, Quentin quite admitted,—no competitor in whatever lists could be more finely equipped. Fate had granted him, at the crucial instant, this additional chance of working on a girl's sentiment, a woman's pitifulness,—his sorrow and his loss. Urged with the arts which any man who had seen him act could credit to him, it might have been fatal for Helena,—just. It just might, thought Quentin, having cogitated, turned it over carefully: and the man was far too adroit not to see his opportunity.

Very well: there had not been much choice, and he had chosen. He had 'cut' the girl,—shown her out,—a thing that made Quentin himself wince to think of, in the case of Helena Falkland: a fortiori worse for a conqueror such as Ingestre, who had barely recognised defeat before. He had negatived, deliberately, his own assertive nature: forgone all action at the crisis, withdrawn from the heroic attitude,—simply refrained.

There was a long pause in Quentin's cogitations there, his eagle-eyes lowered to the little brasier. He had thirty miles of uneven English road in his limbs, and it was delightful to rest in such comfort, quiet,—with a record behind him. Falkland would be sick with him, for venturing to break the record for a summer day single-handed. Falkland, in all such undertakings, expected to be at his side.

Well then, to resume, granted he had got it straight, the thing was there, it did exist,—the poets and people were right. He had always hoped it might be so. Quentin's youthful bitterness had grown on him fast of late, owing to circumstances, and to over-work: and it needed a powerful counteracting influence, just at this point, to shake off the cynical scales. Now he had it,—what one might call a decent demonstration, and in a human form

he could respect. Feeling always in a mild degree responsible for Helena, since he had become engaged to her mistakenly in the public columns, and in the popular mind, Quentin did respect Ingestre, and thanked him too. It might be a poor show from the purely dramatic point of view, but from Quentin's it was a 'good effort,'—what his father's family called a 'beau geste.' His eyes, on their last travels round the log-house, rested for a passing instant on the owner's head. John's dark head was propped on his hand, while he answered letters with the rapid indifference of a ready writer. His guest, courteous on instinct, had not disturbed him even to the extent of spying on him previously: but he just glanced that way in approval now. One could not say anything to him, naturally; but Quentin would have liked to thank him once—as demonstrator—if as nothing else.

Soon after that, being all but asleep, he decided it might be as well, after all, to go to bed, as he had been directed to do some time since. Having picked up the facts he required from head-quarters, he had to 'cut,' at all costs, before the women were about in the morning. Not that he specially wished to avoid Helena—Miss Falkland; only he thought, just at this moment, considering everything—and Ingestre—it might be as well. Ingestre might quite well put a bullet through his head, on the impulse of the moment, if he spoke to her,—that was one thing. But besides that, he was the sort of man who finished things off, once he had begun them; and he would finish them best, in this instance,—and with that girl,—alone.

V

Later on, John went out, as soon as the first light gave him an excuse. It could not be called a new habit for him to see the sun rise at Routhwick, but it was a habit which he had intermitted for a considerable period. It belonged to

the log-house's quite young days : to the days when his mother had been his only natural authority,—call it the only days when John had recognised authority at all.

It had been a fine night, and it was going to be a lovely day, this that took him south to his mother's funeral. It would be wasted in the train,—the first fine day for a month and more ! Such is life. Johnny bathed first : then he took a walk to the village post-box, to get the letters off his hands : then, being practically-minded by daylight, and having still plenty of time in front of him till the world rose, he made a tour of his property to see if he could catch any of his servants out in their manner of disposing things—his things—overnight. However, since they were all unnecessarily conscientious in this part of the world, he found nothing particular to criticise. He sought and prowled about in vain. It was not beautifully done—far from it—but it was thoroughly, efficiently done,—a working efficiency. There was not an ounce of originality or taste in one of them.

This applied especially to the garden. On the gardeners above all Johnny had to keep a hand of iron, or he would have taken prizes for turnips and so on at all the local shows, and never had a flower worth looking at.

Flowers reminded him ; and still practically-minded, thinking of the immediate future, he went to have a look at the lilies. Ursula would object to them, probably, because they were not completely white. Also, they would send masses of common white things, paper-white and scentless from the hothouses at the Hall. But then, this was Routhwick, his mother's own place, and the beds that she herself had first cultivated.

The lilies were there all right, at the extremity of the walled garden, in his mother's long bed, wide-awake, crisp, and looking out for him : not dank and shut and sodden like lots of the flowers. They were a proper kind of plant to look at, upstanding, generous, not coy and shy and silly,—Johnny did not wonder his mother liked them.

And these were a new kind, procured with much labour, a kind she had never seen. They had taken to the Yorkshire soil at once—nice of them—it would be a bit of a pity to cut them down. Still, all things must go in a month or two, and now they were just at their best.

Very good. Johnny—perhaps a little less than practical by this time,—decided the lilies should go. They were very nice lilies, if they were not quite the correct ones. They smelt nice too, less overpowering than the early kind. Ursula could have the correct ones made,—in plaster of Paris,—or chiffon,—if she wished. He did not cut them while they were still wet, that could wait. He only interviewed them critically, all in turn, devoting them internally to the sacrifice,—to the pyre.

Then he turned round, and stopped, as though shot.

The thing he had not thought of, all this time, was that Miss Falkland should rise early to look at the lilies too. How could he think of it? First, he was thinking for the moment of other things,—there were really so many just now. And next, having always seen her in London, he was apt to forget that she was a country girl,—country born and bred. He thought she remained nicely asleep till people called her, and then did all the things that girls do, and came to breakfast. He thought she was like Ursula, in short, who nowadays never got up early except for hunting, and only then when he lugged her out of bed. How could he so have mistaken—values, as to think Helena was like Ursula? Yet he had.

She had not seen him, and he was frightened, and stood still. Frightened was the word. He looked behind him,—there was no retreat. The path he stood on finished in a bay of the wall, cosily occupied for social purposes by a green seat; and her path joined it, just ten yards away. He could advance, of course, and meet her: go to meet his fate, as it had always been his boast to do,—but he was frightened, terrified without shame of doing harm to her,

she looked so exquisite as she came. She was moving slowly, stately in her manner, head bent, her skirts brushing the wet flowers. And so pale,—heavens, how pale she was ! She had been suffering, a day and two nights, because he had snubbed her. . . .

There was another thing too, a thing he had noted long before, when he met her first in the lilies' company, that day in his father's hall. Only if he suspected, guessed at it then, it exhaled from her now,—the immaculate. Meredith, in a famous passage, holds that those who sleep beneath a flowering tree in spring-time must be good. It is surely as true that those who choose to wake and walk at dawn must be pure,—there is a marked unwillingness to face that hour otherwise. Our poets prove it : Herbert could qualify the dawn in a few lovely words,—Herrick could not, however much the glow-worms lit the dusk for him. It was that, something like that, but less expressible, that Johnny felt in her : foolish, no doubt, since she was a far from extraordinary, ignorant English girl. But since she was the beloved of his life, he may be allowed to have an instinct in the matter.

She came to the end of her path, and stopped.

'John !' she said. They were alone with nature, so nature spoke.

'Yes, my dear,' he said quickly, for he had the advantage. By at least a minute and a half the advantage had been his. They stood at their full height, beautiful pair, at ten paces' distance, their eyes exchanging facts intimately, but without familiarity. Familiarity is never a quality bred by grief. 'Over,' said his eyes, and hers did not dispute it, only her wistful look strengthened to certainty. That was what Helena had expected, to find him in the life and feel quite sure.

'I'm sorry about your mother,' she said softly, when she could.

'I knew you would be,' said Johnny. 'That's why it was—no good, partly. I had to be alone.' That was

as far as he ever went, at that or any other time, in apology.

Again they stood in the sun, and she looked downward, the insidious moor-breeze fanning her little curls. She was uncertain what came next, questioning as to retirement,—Johnny must help. So he helped by coming up to her, meeting her really,—why not? Since she was here among the lilies, when he was lonely, why should he, on this of all mornings, drive her away? His mother would look after her, even if he could not. Whatever other realm were denied them they were king and queen, unchallenged, of this fresh morning world. One might steal a march, with the least effort, on the rest of chattering, ape-like humanity. With the smallest moral or dramatic effort, that could be done.

‘Come and see my river,’ he suggested, in a delicate tone and tentative manner. ‘It’s better than yours.’

Helena was surprised, a little. She turned her head and looked round her. Then, as though the loneliness and the lilies relieved her too, she turned to him, laughed a shadow of her little laugh, and came. So that was all right. Up went Johnny’s spirits, merely to have her: and up went Helena’s, merely to be at his side.

‘Do we go that way?’ she enquired, as he stopped at the little gate of the Lyke-wood, on the western or gale-ward side of the garden wall.

‘I’d take you, like a shot,’ said Johnny, reflecting over it. ‘Only I’ve got a visitor.’

‘A visitor?’

He nodded. ‘Friend of yours. Young Auberon.’

‘Quentin here?’ She was amazed.

‘He looked in about midnight,’ said Johnny, ‘cool as you please. Sat and told me what to think, for several hours. Now he’s asleep, after a day and a half across country. He’s only had four hours’ sleep, see? He might be dangerous if we woke him up.’

‘Yes, he might,’ said Helena thoughtfully. ‘Poor Quentin. Very well.’ She sighed, because she had so

wanted to see the camp and its defences. However, they went on.

Johnny discouraged the advances of the dogs in the yard, though Helena begged for them. They might knock her into the river, he said. How far jealousy entered into his calculations, need not be asked. He wanted Helena to himself, this morning. So, having told the smaller dogs not to be asses, and quenched the largest with the heel of his boot, they proceeded to the stile.

'Sure your shoes are thick enough?' said Johnny with a scruple. 'There's a dew and a half, you know,—pints to the square inch,—and heaps of time to go and change.' Helena only laughed: she regarded it as a joke to get wet, still among those ages. 'And there are hours to breakfast, I ought to tell you,' proceeded her host. 'Are you hungry?'

'I shall be, if you talk about it,' said Helena. 'Don't.'

'I'll go and get you some cheese from the farm,' said Johnny thoughtfully. 'It's jolly good cheese, and the bread's home-made.'

'Do be quiet,' said Helena, laughing and detaining him. She was so afraid that he would leave her that she detained him with a hand. 'Talk about something else quickly. Tell me why Quentin came.'

So Johnny told her, as they went across the fields. He told her all about Jill; for, having reconsidered it, or rather her, he saw no harm. It was a woman's history, fitted for a woman's ear. It was a girl's history too. There was much that was painful, but nothing that was odious, in it. Helena could hear some things he preferred to keep from Auberon,—still better, she could be judge what Auberon ought finally to know. Johnny had wanted a confidante badly, throughout the business, for he never really liked thinking alone. He had been very unhappy in the station that day, and he had all but made a confidante of Ursula. He nearly always chose a woman, if he could find one, to think with,—as may have been noticed in this chronicle:—telling her, of course, what to think by the way, but

finding his own thoughts the more easily for her society. That was why he was so clearly constructed to be a good husband to somebody, the somebody he had not found. He had been extremely useful to Ursula, if you came to that, and Ursula had lost the habit of thinking for herself in consequence,—because Ursula was not the right one. The right one would have kept the habit in spite of him,—long, long since, on the night of his own dance, Johnny had had an inkling of that. He needed something buoyant at his side, not a dead weight of dependence, though he was strong enough—just—to bear that. But it irked him, and he treated it badly,—though he saw that it thought in the right way.

Now he had the buoyant thing of his desire, precisely, and he was perfect in fair dealing. He did not hector at all, unless in fun, once or twice. Helena did some hectoring. Helena told him he was hard on Jill: she told him he was horrid about it. She had always loved Jill, ever since she saw her act that day,—though of course she had hated her for acting so beautifully. Thus she explained, and Johnny quite understood. He had hated the girl for acting beautifully too. He had had to buck up himself, in quite a tiring degree, to take her on. In fact it might be argued—but Helena was not going to pay him compliments, she was intent on the other question. She made him go on, right through, to the bitter end,—which was no end, of course, only conjecture. His suspicions,—the reasons of his suspicions,—his view of the girl's character,—all about it.

Then she was silent for a time, digesting it.

'Poor Quentin!' she said. That was her first thought. It was said with most earnest feeling, and Johnny had to bear it. He bore it, on the whole, well.

'He was in a fair way,' he admitted. 'Seldom saw a man so sick. He was ready to heave rocks at the scenery, as it was. If I told him the rest of it—my word——!'

'But won't you have to?' said Helena.

Johnny waited. 'Well, you see, nothing may ever happen. No reason to put him out if nothing does. Is there?'

'You mean, they may never find her?'

'No.'

'Alive—or otherwise?'

'They may never find her otherwise,' said Johnny

'And if they do?'

'Then I suppose I must break it to him. Her intention, I mean. But I shan't show him the journal.'

'I think,' said Helena, having bent her fair brow, in earnest thought, for some time, 'that you *ought* to. Because, you see, she left it for him. Don't you think you ought?'

'No,' said Johnny.

'Have you read it?'

'No,' said Johnny.

'Well, then, how do you know—oh dear,' she laughed, 'if you really think so! Only——'

'Don't you?' he asked.

'I've not seen it,' temporised Helena. Johnny considered for a time. It was beautiful to have so much time before them, during this leisurely morning walk. They took full five-and-thirty minutes to walk to the bridge: which, considering their respective form, was disgraceful.

'I'd show it you if—I thought it any good,' he said. 'But I don't,—see? It's nothing against you, it's merely the sickly futility of the whole affair. She was good stuff, that girl, properly speaking. But she went bad, owing to circumstances. Rotten bad. Not her fault.'

'I see,' said Helena. 'Poor darling. I wish I had known her a little more.'

'Yes, I wish you had,' said Johnny, overpowered by the clear genius of this suggestion. 'You could have taught her a thing or two.'

'Oh, I didn't mean that,' said Helena. 'I didn't at all feel like teaching her anything.'

Johnny adored her again for this. Little she knew!

But he was quite right not to show her that journal, obviously. She knew nothing of the sort of kind, thank the Lord!

So they came to the bridge. 'There!' said Johnny, scoring, by the one word, all that was necessary.

Helena nodded to his challenging spark: and by her steady look abroad, embracing his river, accepted the score.

The water had gone down a good bit, as Quentin said; some of the rocks were out, and a few were even dry. But it was still grand enough to think about, even to think at length: though not so maddening, so distracting to the spirit as it had been. Besides, the sun improved matters, the bright morning sun flashing on the foaming rapids, and making rainbows in the spray above them. It was a much more heartening spectacle to-day than it had been that bitter grey morning, in the small hours of which the bridge went down.

Helena exclaimed with pity—she had pity for everything—over the broken bridge.

'Don't go too near,' advised Johnny, sitting down himself extremely near, on a remnant of the ragged parapet.

'Oh, do be careful!' said Helena, vexed.

—'And what you might not understand,' said Johnny, when she had found a seat near him, harking back as intimates do to the previous question, after a purely external interruption, 'some of it,—that journal business,—was put on. Practising passion,—playing at it. We do that.'

'Do you?' said Helena, puzzled.

'We do at times. When we're—not at our best. It—er—feels rather nice.'

'Deceive yourselves, you mean?'

'No,' said Johnny. 'I don't think we ever quite do that, that's the worst of it. You can—er—confuse yourself a little, if you're careful. It's a kind of self-indulgence; risky a bit, like opium-eating,—specially for a girl.'

Seems to me worse for a girl, I may be wrong. Not that she could help it, really.'

He sighed: then, lunging suddenly side-long from his precarious station, leant on his elbow to gaze at the water beneath him, loosening several bits of stone by his movement, which trickled into the stream.

Helena gasped, and very nearly clutched him again. She did wish he would be careful, flinging himself about like that!

It struck her, considering him in his new position, that if he had, really, walked with them recently in the mountains, he would have done things like that on purpose to make Quentin, who climbed by theory in classical style, annoyed. Helena could see him doing them. It was wrong, of course, to imagine him quarrelling with Quentin about trifles, in the mountains, and the consequent efforts incumbent upon her, as the friend of both, to make peace. She had better not think about it, or she might laugh,—or cry, which would be worse. It had caught her breath already, now that he was river-gazing, and she could watch him unobserved, to see how tired he was. So Helena locked her hands in her lap, in order not to be tempted to save Johnny from sudden death, if he desired it, and set herself, with her eyes on the river, to puzzle at the terrible problem of Miss Jacoby,—Jill.

'You mean she was not *really* in love with Quentin?' she ventured shyly.

'Oh, yes, my dear,' said Johnny. 'Oh—yes!'

He was perfectly abstracted, plunged in a river-trance. So Helena, smiling, let him alone, and leant back in her more comfortable corner. It was not wrong at least to rest, and dream, and feel safe in his society. Anybody could do that. As the sun's strength grew greater, warming them, there seemed no reason to talk, or move. Lord Levinson's cows, coming down the opposite bank not far below to drink, and flick at the morning fly with their tassled tails, scarcely turned a glance in their direction,

they sat so motionless. Johnny, indeed, was in danger of falling asleep. The hot sun of daybreak, after a sleepless night, is stupefying,—let those who doubt it try.

‘Oughtn’t we to be——?’ began Miss Falkland at last, recalled to time after an interval of eternity. ‘Oh, what’s the matter?’

It seemed that her voice, falling into the long pause, had startled John. Sitting up of a sudden, he put a hand to his head.

‘Idiot!’ he ejaculated, with astonishing vigour, dropping the hand to his knee. Overdoing things as usual, he nearly jerked himself off into the water; however, he recovered, and got up. He looked dazed, and drowsy: seemed searching rather at random for his ordinary faculties to reassure her.

‘I don’t mean you,’ he explained, stopping in front of her,—she was gazing up with lifted brows. ‘Somebody else I happened to think of. It just came over me.’

‘Lord Levinson?’ asked Helena. She had, of course, heard that story, at full length, in Johnny’s letters from Routhwick; and she had noticed him lately gaze across the water, as though considering.

‘Oh, he is too,’ said Johnny reassuringly. ‘Only this is a worse case. Levinson never had any brains. The one I’m thinking of has got ’em,—one or two.’

‘Oh then, I know who it is,’ said Helena.

‘Do you?’ said Johnny, disconcerted. Miss Falkland had also risen, and they turned and began to walk back, side by side.

‘You happen to think of him rather often, don’t you?’ said Helena.

Johnny glanced at her. He had never before let a little cub of nineteen tease him. Violet, uncomfortably brilliant as she had been at that dangerous age, had pretty well had to mind her p’s and q’s in his company. He had allowed no liberties.

On the way home, Helena talked to him: he was quiet,

thinking, as was clear ; looking about him, though,—he never missed anything of interest in the landscape,—he even bent and picked her up a tiny flower once. Helena thought of his mother, the way he had always mentioned her, even passingly : and the way his wife had mentioned her too. She now supposed, accounting for his altered manner, that with the return to the house, the day's grave duties came back to him. He had been entertaining her lately, acting host, acting courtier, as he had been trained. It was she who was wrong to have forgotten, even for a moment, his situation.

They came over the high fields of rich grass, the grass from which, with the intervention of a few natural processes, the famous cheeses of the dale are made. They were plain fields, all of them, well-kept and untrimmed, like all things in Yorkshire, respectable only in their essential wealth : with the absurd little stone gaps between that all well-grown youths and maidens must writhe themselves to get through. Twice, having energy to spare, he flung himself over the wall, leaving her to negotiate the gap alone,—no sorrow in all the world could quench those fires in him. And once he refrained from so doing, deliberately, because there were certain of his labouring subjects in the path who spoke to him. That was the only moment when he recalled to Helena his London royalty.

'I'm afraid your feet are undoubtedly wet, Miss Falkland,' he said, as they approached the higher civilisation of his own domain.

'They are undoubtedly,' she laughed. 'Only I think I like your kind of wetness as much as any I have tried lately—Mr. Ingestre.'

She just added it in order to correct anything she might have done wrong before. It was marked with that intention clearly, and Mr. Ingestre swore in his heart. Luckily she was far, very far from penetrating that department of him,—he and his mother, between them, had kept her safe.

He pushed her through the little gate into the upper

garden, without a thought, his fingers on her arm. Then, being reminded, he dropped them off her easily, half-way to the house. His servant Blandy unlatched the Lyke-wood gate, and issued with a hasty step into the garden, immediately in their way.

'Hold up,' said Johnny warningly.

'Beg pardon, Miss, I'm sure,' said Blandy, recoiling politely. 'It's Mrs. Ingestre, Mr. John. She wishes to know if you'll be breakfasting at the bungalow, or in the house.'

'I'm breakfasting with Mr. Auberon,' said Johnny succinctly. 'And it's not a bungalow—tell Mrs. Ingestre.'

'Mr. Auberon's gone, sir.'

'What?' Johnny swung round. 'Confound you, what do you want to let him go for? I've got something special to say.'

'Yes, sir,' said Blandy regretfully. 'I went in and found Mr. Auberon instead of you—as he explained——'

'You shut up,' said Johnny. 'It's not your bed anyhow.'

Blandy was not so sure of this: however, he did not argue, since Miss Falkland was there. 'You'll be breakfasting in the house, sir,'—was all he said.

'I shan't breakfast anywhere till I've seen Mr. Auberon. See? You go and find him,' said Johnny.

'The train's ten-thirty-eight,' observed Blandy. 'That's starting nine-thirty at latest in the present state of things.'

'When I want time-tables, I'll ask for them,' said Johnny. 'You go and do what I say.'

'Yes, sir. Mr. Auberon might be some miles off by this time. All depends the direction he chose to take.'

'And he didn't confide in you?' queried Johnny, leaning against the gate. 'Blandy, you are a goat, really! I *want* him. He—er—never said good-bye.'

Blandy looked at Miss Falkland, who was laughing. He hardly wondered, either. This was not Mr. John's best manner, the high-class one he kept for public occasions.

It was as though Mr. John did not reckon Miss Falkland as the public, quite.

'Perhaps he never does say good-bye,' said Johnny. 'Does he, Miss Falkland? She knows him,'—to Blandy. 'Oh, dash the man! He never does a thing you'd expect, so far as I've observed him. I thought he could sleep for five hours, safe. Blandy, I say,—it's serious.'

'Yes, sir,' said Blandy. He now had an idea, by Johnny's eyes, that it was. He was very well used to reading him.

'Too serious for Miss Falkland,' said Johnny. 'She can go. At least I mean, we will leave her, with her kind permission. Do you mind?'

He was silent a minute or two, while the girl made her way up the garden: quite silent, leaning on the gate. Then he spoke in another tone. 'Look here,' he said. 'There isn't much time, as a fact, and I'm bothered about this. Have you—er—got a minute?'

'Yes, sir,' said Blandy,—mendaciously. He ought to have gone straight to Ursula.

'It's the usual thing,' said Johnny, drawing him inside the wood. 'I've been a fool, from the first.'

'About the girl?' said Blandy.

'That's it. I've a living conviction, now, where she is. Can't tell you how. It came to me on the bridge. Or rather where—I ought to be slain for being such an ass,' said Johnny, frowning. 'But I don't suppose we could have saved her.'

'You've done all a man can do,' said the young man, with absolute certainty. 'And it's your food you want,—begging your pardon.' Blandy's eyes were directed resentfully to John's bed, since they had now reached the log-house.

'Oh, that's all right.' Johnny glanced that way too. 'I didn't—er—happen to have time, you haven't always. Fact is, I've been keeping two things going the last few days,—it's that does the trick. And I've pretty well played the fool in both, as it now turns out,—never mind.'

'You tell me what to do,' said Blandy.

'Can you, do you think? You'd be awfully kind. It's simply catching Auberon,—I'll write to him,—and—er—backing him up. He's a respectable man of his sort——'

'He's a gentleman,' said Blandy.

'Put it that way if you like,' said Johnny. 'I've known some that weren't. I'd do it if I had a chance, give you my word. And that young fellow at the house—Miss Falkland's brother—is a bit young for the job. You're as old as I am, aren't you?—pretty near.'

'I shall do,' said Blandy. 'All you've got to do, is to tell me. There's nothing you should be thinking of, but one thing, to-day.'

'I've an idea,' said Johnny, dropping into his chair, 'that you said that the day I was married. But I didn't, I thought of heaps of things. And for all that I got married very decently,—no thanks to you or Hertford. . . . Blandy, you are a ripper. Do you really not mind? There's the doctor, of course,—or Fox. No, not Fox. Or I could go by the night train.'

'I wish you would stop talking,' said Blandy angrily. 'You'll go with Mrs. Ingestre by the morning train as fixed, no nonsense. I'll follow you by the night one. Beg pardon, Mr. John.'

Johnny laughed. 'All right,' he said, 'only I didn't fix it. I'd sooner Mrs. Ingestre was out of it, that's a fact. She's barely fit. Miss Falkland's all right,—she's fit for anything. I've been telling her about it. And she knows Auberon, so that's straight.'

Blandy waited now. Such things as were within his range, he could do; but all these delicate extras were beyond him. His master as usual held the strings, and was straightening them, sitting at his table.

'Look here,—come close.' Blandy came to the table. 'This is what I am writing to Auberon, and what you shall take. He knows nothing, at present, though he was getting there, being smart, when I saw him; and he'll have seen some of the people by now. If only he hadn't

been in such a darned hurry. . . . It'll be a jar for him, for certain. You can count on that.'

'Yes, sir,' said Blandy.

'That girl was poisoned, not drowned. She—er—said so, if I'd thought. Some narcotic,—sleeping-mixture,—laudanum probably. And the place to look for her is not in the water, in consequence,—my—er—literary instincts threw me out,—but on land.'

'Yes, sir,' said Blandy.

'Just on land,' said Johnny. 'Just beyond the bridge.'

'Kettley Bridge, sir?'

He nodded. 'The bridge that's no bridge. Levinson's plantation, probably. Not far anyhow, she hadn't the strength. Quite near the road. I'm as sure of it as if I had seen her—somehow.'

'Yes, sir,' said Blandy: sure of it too.

'She just lay down, the first place she felt safe in,' said Johnny. 'That's how I see it—now—I may be wrong. Lord help her,' he added suddenly, his head dropping on his hands, 'poor little soul!'

'That's Miss Falkland,' said Blandy to himself: a bit of wonderful penetration, born of his love for Johnny. It was the first time,—and he had heard most of the discussions,—that he had heard his master speak one word of pity for the girl he suspected of having taken her own life.

As for Mrs. Ingestre, she had shown disgust, first and last, on the subject.

VI

Ursula rose that morning determined to do all things in order and nicely, as she best knew how. On an occasion of such sober state, of sufficient grief, with two well-bred and adaptable young people like the Falklands to assist the proceedings, it might all have been carried through without error and in excellent style: but John was inconvenient.

He was even excessively so, more than usual. He began by turning up to breakfast at the house, when she had reckoned on his remaining in retirement at his bungalow. That was the first shock. Next, and in natural consequence, there was not breakfast enough. Miss Falkland was hungry too, as it happened, but John was ravenous. Between them, Ursula's resources were taxed, since she had arrested her household economy with trained precision, in view of the immediate breaking up of the party. John never failed to be ravenous just when her arrangements most required him not to be, that went without saying; but this particular morning, it was a little improper as well. So was his easy manner of conversing with Mr. Falkland,—so was the too-evident fact that he had been bathing,—so were his clothes.

Ursula herself came down in black, of course, a sheet of black, though her husband was puzzled where she found the materials, since she had assured him two nights since that she had none. It is rather startling what women can do in these ways,—dyeing themselves,—it made Johnny, who still felt sleepy, think vaguely of that picture in a German story-book which everyone knows, in which a large ink-pot takes the foremost place. Only Ursula's face and hands were white—very white. She looked nice, he freely admitted, whenever he glanced that way. She had seldom looked so nice in his memory. It was quite a pity she did not mourn for people,—fairly indifferent people,—oftener. He could have spared one or two of her relations very well.

Johnny did not say this last aloud, though he kindly congratulated Ursula after breakfast. He had the art of paying compliments with effect and without offence, and she was not immune from flattery. Since he also strapped her boxes for her, and gave her more than enough money for all her extra expenses, Ursula liked him for at least five minutes. He was distinctly nice, helping her in her room. But it did not last. He proceeded to cut his wife out with

all the servants in turn, just when she most wished to talk to them, which made her frantic naturally. There is nothing a woman can less well bear than man's interference in that, her peculiar province: and at Routhwick, John was always doing it. Having had an intimate conversation with the housekeeper, who had known his mother in the old times, and made her cry,—if John did not make the servants cry one way, it was another,—he actually went and changed; and reappeared looking so right in every particular, and so eminently what Blandy called high-class as well, that Ursula could not but approve of him again. If John had only always looked like that, it would have been purely a credit to belong to him.

Finally, when Ursula was just convinced that all was well, and the day's preparations nicely completed, he made a perfectly extraordinary commotion in the hall, a few minutes before starting, over an entirely unimportant matter, the flowers she was taking to London. It seemed the gardener had done something wrong about them, and so John was using the worst language in front of the servants and in the hearing of poor little Miss Falkland too.

Ursula shut the door of the dining-room, where poor little Miss Falkland was, for safety, and went to take, as it was right his wife should do, her share of the blame.

It was nothing in the world, so it turned out, but that the gardener had, quite naturally, cut all the little yellow things out of the centres of the autumn lilies, to make them white.

'They always do,' explained Ursula patiently. 'It's the custom.'

'Custom be hanged,' said Johnny, only he did not say that. 'What right has he got to meddle with the flowers? I told him to cut the stalks.'

'And they carry better,' pursued Ursula in the same mild, hushed voice. 'He's perfectly right, John. No, I did not tell him to do it,—I gave no orders. I suppose a good gardener knows.'

John said, then he was welcome to go where the good gardeners go to, only by the rest of his remarks, it did not seem to be quite the place. He was ready for him to go to several places, only not Routhwick. He would not trouble him to stay there.

'Don't be absurd,' said Ursula, several times. He did not really mean to send Holroyd away, who had been with them years. 'They look perfectly nice, and anybody can see what they are meant for. That's all that matters, surely.'

Johnny said he did not want to carry the rubbish-heap to London. His mother had never cared for that.

'Hush!' said Ursula, shocked. 'You must be quiet, John. The whole house will hear you.'

'Let 'em,' said Johnny. 'And see they obey orders next time, and not cut all my best things to bits. Mutilation, I call it. What's a flower without its anthers? What's a woman without her hair? Perhaps you'll see it that way, Holroyd.'

Ursula decided to smile, as the least of evils. 'They look extremely nice, Holroyd,' she said. 'Mr. John's joking. It's all right.'

She hoped it would be sufficient reproof to him to admit that he could be joking, on such a theme, at such a moment: but he did not appear reproved. He was rather flushed to the last, and short-tempered,—he snapped even at Miss Falkland when she said good-bye. Mr. and Miss Falkland were going, Ursula had told her household, by the later train. She hoped they would be quite comfortable, and really hated leaving them. She was full of apologies, especially to Harold, but she was sure they understood.

It was a long drive to Kettleby Station by Egstone, and Johnny forgot his grievance against the gardener, and was quiet enjoying the air. He sat opposite his wife, having given the white lilies his place beside her, and it struck Ursula, being at such close quarters, that he looked tired.

Fagged, was her word. She saw some little lines in his brow that she had never noticed before, and which surprised her. For the first time it entered her mind that John, her young John, could ever grow old. She regarded him as her junior, irresistibly, and treated him so, though she told herself at fixed intervals that his age was no less than hers.

The whole way to the station,—as is the habit of husband and wife when free of company and the necessity of talking,—they hardly exchanged a word.

‘Where’s Blandy,—at the station?’ asked Ursula once.

‘No,’ said Johnny. ‘He’s coming by the night train.’

She was surprised, but left it. Blandy had so many uses, that it was waste of time to consider what he might or might not be doing. She was only disappointed, lazily, because he could not do things for her at the station. But then, John would be there.

After a time, Ursula told him what a nice girl Miss Falkland was.

‘Yes,’ said Johnny, looking at the view. The view was no view, since they were driving through the plainest part of Egstone town.

‘It’s a pity she’s seen so little of you,’ said Ursula.

‘Egstone Bank,’ said Johnny with an effort, ‘was built by William the Conqueror.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ said Ursula.

‘I was only keeping it up,’ said Johnny. He continued gazing out for a minute, and then he turned and looked at her, full in the eyes. Hers dropped,—she also blushed a little.

Nothing else happened at all till they came into Kettley, and, at the station turn, passed the post office.

‘Why, there’s Mr. Auberon!’ said Ursula, really amazed.

‘Oh, good,’ said Johnny, stirring. ‘Thank goodness. Where?’

‘In the post office. He saw us, I think. Shall I stop the man?’

Johnny had already nodded to 'the man,' who had looked round, and the carriage drew up. 'How long have we got?' said Johnny, looking at his watch. 'Dash it all! Why couldn't you leave me a little more time?'

'How should I know you wanted to see him?' said Ursula. 'You never even mentioned he was in the neighbourhood.' She was offended,—of course. He had forgotten she was bound to be.

'Didn't I?' said Johnny. 'All right,—shut up, Ursula.'

Mrs. Ingestre did not shut up, when Mr. Auberon, who was her friend, and whose people her people had known, approached the carriage. Why should she? He was quite a nice boy, and she liked him. She shook hands with him, and talked, though Johnny could have slain her, having so little time. Auberon's forbearance under her futile remarks, on this occasion, was revolting. He had no business to be civil,—he ought to have shot her or knocked her down.

'Did Blandy catch you?' said Johnny formally, in Ursula's presence, though he had no doubt of it. 'I launched him in the dark.'

'He caught me at Egstone Bank,' said Quentin. 'I waited there.'

'In time, then,' said Johnny.

'In good time, thanks. We got through.'

'I expected to see him, not you,' said Johnny.

'Did you want him?' said Quentin, slightly frowning.

'No,—I didn't want you, that's all.'

'John, how polite you are!' said Ursula: and so on.

'I had to come in to catch the post,' said Quentin.

'And I had a thing or two to ask as well, if Mrs. Ingestre would——'

'She will,' said Johnny. 'Come up to the station, Auberon,—I'll meet you there.' The carriage moved. 'Now——' he began.

Ursula broke in, indignant. 'You might as well tell me, John,—it's too absurd. Talking over me like that,

as if I was a child ! It isn't as if I couldn't guess the business, either. And I'm every bit as much concerned about that girl as you.'

'Yes,' said Johnny. He glanced at his watch again, and snapped it with decision. 'You're perfectly right, Ursula. We've rather left you in the lurch these last days. I've been rather taken up. Now, listen here, will you ? We don't happen to want you, at the station. Time's short, and we shall do best alone.'

'Thanks,' said Ursula. Johnny went on.

'Since he's here in this fashion, it can only mean one thing,—that they have found that little girl,—and that she's dead.'

'John !' She flinched visibly,—quailed. He saw the sheaf of lilies she was holding shudder.

'Now,—will you abstain from small-talk to him,—weather and so on ? It's very nice weather, but he probably knows it, and he has about as much as a man can bear. Do you quite entirely grasp his position ?'

Ursula, blankly gazing, did not, the least.

'Well, then, I'll prompt a little. That kid slew herself for him,—one might almost say to spite him,—because he would not look at her. I'll make no comment on that, since you knew her, and you're a woman. . . . Now he's got to look at her,—only she's dead. No fun.'

'John !' she flashed. 'What a way to put it.'

'It's nice and short,' said Johnny. 'He could have got clean off,—he's no earthly call to disturb himself. I gave him the chance, at least three times over,—but he wouldn't. See that ?'

'Yes, of course. He is very conscientious.'

'Quite so,—we agree. Well, now he has to face an inquest, and the filthy talk a case of that kind always brings up. He might dodge it again, but he intends to stand the racket, probably. He will get the whole of it, since I'm not there. Do you quite see what all that means ? Do you know him at all ?'

'Of course I do. Much better than you do. He's rather good at business,—he'd manage that horrid kind of thing quite as well as you.'

'Thanks. You don't know him the least, but never mind. That kind of thing would suit me better than him, a lot. If I'd been able to stop, they might have been—er—persuaded to shoot some of it on to me,—saving your presence, Ursula. What's more,' said Johnny, 'I'd have let 'em,—I shouldn't have cared two figs.'

'You needn't be disagreeable,' said Ursula.

'I'm trying to be clear,' said Johnny, 'against time. It's a little hard. There's just one thing—two things—that console me,—make it possible for me to go to London this morning with you, 'stead of to-night. Blandy sat on me, but that's not what I mean. One is—it's Yorkshire and not London,—so that people have a jollier sort of mind.'

'Rubbish,' said Ursula. 'People are just the same everywhere.'

'The other——' said Johnny. 'I'll tell you the other in the train perhaps.' He got out. 'Go on,' he said, 'go over. I'll stop and get a word with him. Think you can manage all right, or shall I do the things?'

'Of course I can manage,' said Ursula huffily. 'I've travelled alone before. Am I to get your ticket?'

'No. I'll get both.'

'They won't let me cross without——' she began; but, seeing his look, she broke short, and went. After all, country station regulations went down before John, wherever he was; and this station above all,—and on this occasion peculiarly. All the Kettley staff met Ursula, her black robes and her white flowers, open-armed. They were all most tender of her, she had no trouble at any point. It was, in its way, enjoyable, a royal progress: only it would have been better, naturally, had her husband shared. But John persisted in inconvenience to the last, turned his back on her, and talked to Quentin Auberon,—about that nasty affair.

'Shan't we go across?' said Quentin. 'I shall make you late.'

'Dash the train!' said John, looking him sharply over. But he was unchanged, almost. He was not a person who changed much. With such an appearance in any other man, John would have questioned if the thing could be done,—really over. In this man he did not question it for a moment. If it were not done, he would not be here.

'You were right,' said Quentin, glancing at him with his cool steel eyes.

'You found her, then? Dead?'

'Oh yes. Some days.'

'Not drowned, then.'

'No, she was poisoned, the doctor thinks. Just what you said.'

'Old Darcy's sleeping-mixture?' said Johnny.

'That's it, bound to be. How did you hit on it? Really,' said Quentin, hesitating for a word,—'it staggered me.'

There was a pause. 'Take it easy, you know,' said Johnny. 'Now listen a minute. I'm far more in fault than you are, just remember that. Keep it in mind. Because I held evidence you didn't,—through old Darcy and so on,—see? If I'd not been fooling over other affairs, personal affairs, I ought to have got there,—in both senses. I just had time. We can time her pretty fairly, you see, because of the bridge. We all had time to get over that night and save her,—I did go over once myself. Only we drivelled,—threw away our chances,—I give you my word.'

'I'd take it,' said Quentin slowly, 'on anything else. You're very kind.'

Johnny waited again. Yes, that meant he was beat, that his brains were. His body was not, even now. He had done the walk to Kettley in record time, simply to get facts out of Ingestre, finish the business, bring himself up to date. And it was not insensitiveness,—he was supremely sensitive. He had been struck, full,—wounded.

He had staggered,—he used the word. But he had not fallen : he had pulled up again, and still walked five miles, hit the post-time, and got in before a train.

Johnny felt, once more, he never could have done it. Struck in the back like that, spitefully, unrighteously, he must have gone down. He would have lost his head, forgotten himself, failed anyhow to come to the scratch. But then, he could never have been sure he was clean of reproach. On one score or another, either of tempting the girl, or of treating her poor little problems carelessly, he could not have gone scatheless before the internal court, whatever callousness he might pretend externally. That was where the crux lay, that was where this boy scored utterly. Superb self-respect, real dignity, consistent kindness too ; and public duty,—that was what he was born for. And this frightful vengeance falling on him—to his nature it was frightful—unearned, and he did not curse the girl in her grave ! The contrary : now that the great stroke had fallen, he would lend her his own strength. Everything he betrayed in that short interview,—and he spoke clearly though slowly,—of what he had done and would do, showed up those facts about him. That he would face the public question, with the oblique odium it must throw on him, in the common minds : that he carried all the weight of that childish ill-considered crime in his own person : that he honoured the dead. He was Greek, a Greek type,—Johnny regretted he could not hear him at that inquest at Egstone, just hear him tell the truth. It was a thousand pities he had only four minutes to know him better, before a train !

As things were, he could only try to be even with him in a few small ways.

‘ I’m sorry I’ve got to leave you like this,’ he said, ‘ but my people have orders, and they are to take yours. Blandy’s got my facts, and Falkland’s still there to stand by you, you won’t be quite alone. I think,’ said Mr. Ingestre in his royal manner, ‘ they won’t bother you much.

My shanty in the wood is at your service, for yourself—or anything. It's a quiet place. Is there anything more ?'

'Tell me how you got there,—guessed it,' Quentin said.

'Just in that way,' said Johnny. 'It struck me, came to me suddenly, she'd be looking for peace, no more,—to get away. And what better than to leave a broken bridge behind you? Put it somebody had told her it would go in the night,—that somebody I never found. Wouldn't that do? I thought it might, at the time. Anyhow I sent Blandy to warn you on the chance. If you'd waited, I'd have come along,—but as things stood, I couldn't risk it.'

'It's first-class,' said Quentin.

'It isn't,' said Johnny. 'it's common sense. All those things are. One might rag the Psychical snobs about it, but it's not worth it, for a simple thing like that. . . . I'm glad it's fixed, at least, for you and everybody. It rather sticks in your throat leaving a thing like that undone.'

'So it does,' said Quentin. 'I'd sooner know.' He added, after an interval, 'There's your train.'

'Is it?' said Johnny. 'By the way, Auberon, I told the whole to Miss Falkland, I thought it best. Will you—er—excuse me?'

'That's all right,' said Quentin, his eagle-eyes looking up the line. 'Look here, you'd better cut and let me get your ticket, hadn't you? I'll bring it round.'

'Two tickets,' said Johnny easily. 'But why should you fag?'

'I've hardly seen Mrs. Ingestre yet,' said Quentin, faintly smiling.

'This train stops two minutes,' said Johnny, 'I rather think it stops for us. That's hardly long enough for a call, and my wife's a stickler for the time-limit, so it won't count. Not worth it, in short, Auberon. I'll get the tickets.'

'I'd better,' said Quentin. 'You're making her anxious.'

'That was cheek,' said Johnny to himself as he crossed the line. 'Common cheek, that was.'

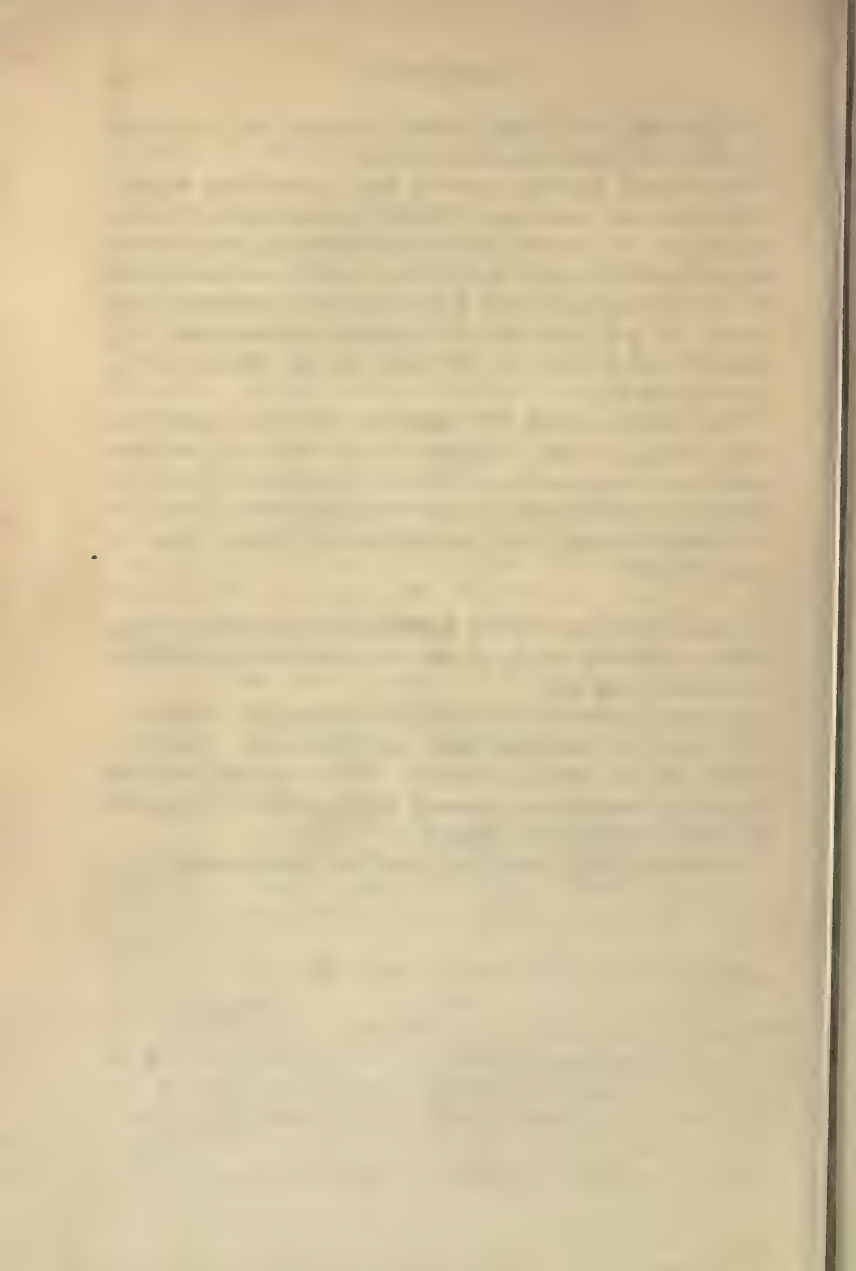
He crossed just in front of the approaching engine, with the entire personnel of Kettley Station looking at him anxiously. No one else in the West Riding would have been allowed to start. But if John could have been killed by any common accident, he would have been killed long since. He got over very comfortably, without hurrying himself, and Ursula sat well back on the station bench, so as not to see.

Two minutes after, Mr. Auberon, who also seemed to enjoy dodging trains, brought Ursula's ticket to her, and bade her a nice good-bye. She had always said he was a pleasant-mannered boy, if rather distant and didactic. He had nearly always been helpful handing things when he came to call.

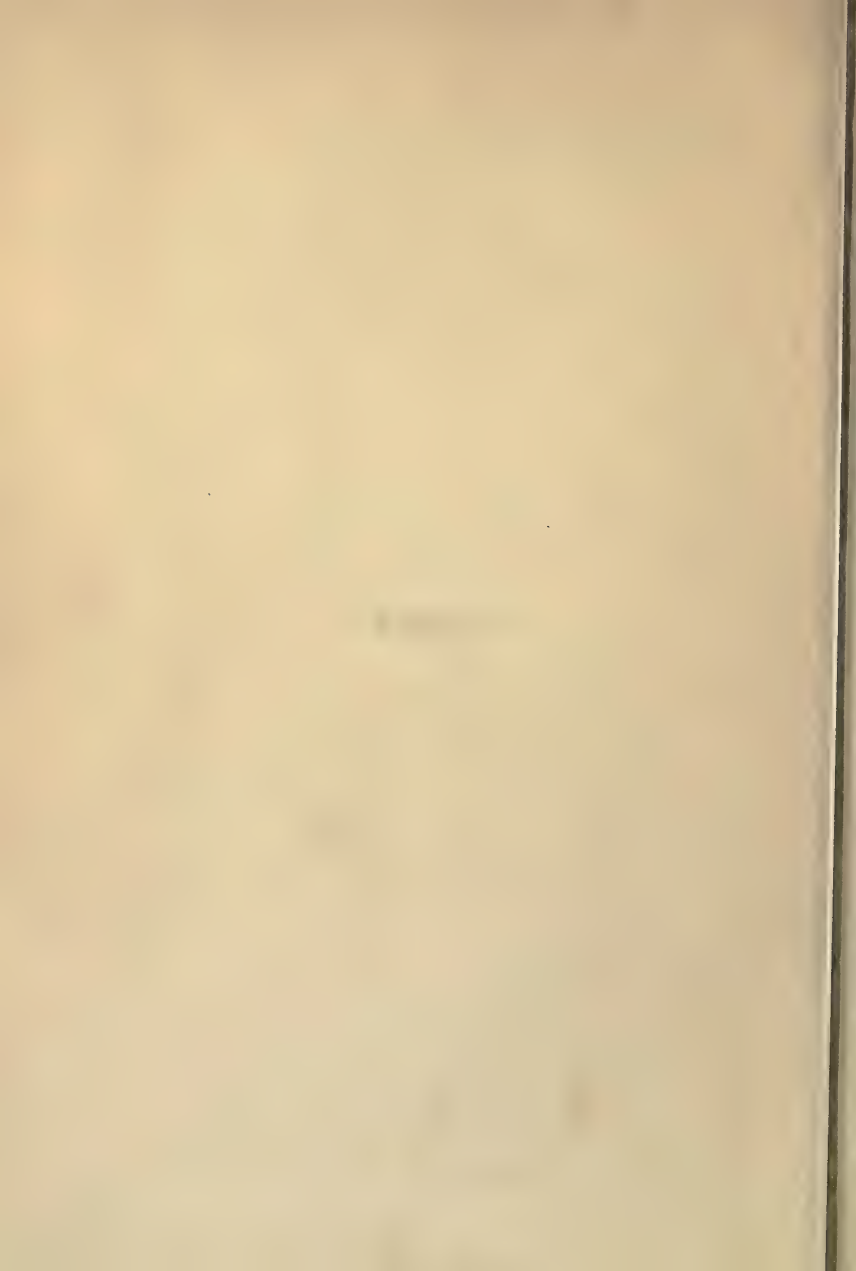
'And of course, she's to have any of the flowers,' said John to Quentin hastily at the last, the lilies in his wife's arms reminding him.

Helena, he meant, was to have them for Jill. 'Stretto,' that was,—the finishing chord, bringing the two girls, the sinless and the sinning, together. But as he sank back on the seat again, his eyes strayed to his mother's lilies with persistent, frowning discontent.

Helena, at least, would not maul the flowers about.



FINALE



‘ AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING ’

A WEEK after her mother-in-law's funeral, Ursula retired to her German baths, to make the best of what was left of the season. This would have astonished nobody, since Ursula was known never to give up a plan she had once proposed, unless the heavens fell and prevented her from performing any part of it. She was a terribly orderly person. But, just as the hunting-season at home was opening, to the overpowering amazement of his family, Johnny went out and joined her ; and after that remained abroad with her the whole winter long.

The accounts Ursula had written of herself would have disturbed nobody, had she continued alone, for like many another morally weak woman, her courage in health matters approached the heroic. No one would ever have gathered from Ursula personally that she was less than well. However, it could only be presumed by Johnny's remarkable proceeding that she had let him gather it,—and he certainly had more practice in reading between the lines of her staid epistles than others of the family. Anyhow, he went.

His accounts of her threw light at once. He said she was quite bad, several times. What it was he could not make out, and it seemed the doctors would not help him. He used violent expressions about doctors' dodging, the senseless jargon they cultivate, which is alike in all languages, and like no real language under the sun ; and he was powerless to extract anything from his wife herself. But that he was, if not anxious about her, at least interested, became increasingly evident, and his

family at home spent their intellect and ingenuity in vain, in trying to account for it.

To begin with, there was no misunderstanding him. 'What's she after now?'—was a common comment on Ursula's letters, but they never had the excuse of uncertainty with John's. He wrote himself down, as he spoke himself out, in life. More clearly even: he weeded his thoughts of obstruction before he wrote them,—the *arrière-pensée* did not tangle the roots of every phrase.

To the first and obvious solution of his preoccupation in this most unexpected quarter, which occurred to Mr. Ingestre and his mother simultaneously, and which they both, in their different disagreeable fashions, threw at Johnny's head, he returned an impatient negative. There was no hope of a child, and they could stop talking of it. Ursula was worrying, that was all, trying to kill herself over some inanity, as lots of women do, and would not tell him a thing about it. He thought she disliked him, he added casually once.

'It's curiosity,' said old Mrs. Ingestre suddenly. 'I've felt it at times, with Ursula, myself. It puts him out, he shouldn't know how she works, so as to instruct us all. That's just like John.'

'No one ever knew yet how women work,' said Mr. Ingestre, throwing the letter angrily aside, 'least of all the women themselves.'

'I make an exception for professional women,' said Mrs. Ingestre. 'Otherwise, I quite agree.'

By professional women, she meant the theatrical profession, as her son knew. He asked how she argued it: but she had grown confused a trifle, so he had to help her. 'You mean you have to know yourself,' he said, 'before you can take on another character.'

'That's about what I mean, John. I should have thought it hardly worth the pains to say.'

'Then you argue Johnny knows himself, and Ursula doesn't?'

‘Johnny’s all right,’ grumbled the old lady. ‘He’s good material.’ Nothing would ever make her grant Johnny was more.

‘Do you think he’s studying Ursula professionally?’ said Mr. Ingestre, amused.

‘I shouldn’t be surprised. Didn’t I say so, at least five minutes ago?’

‘Ah yes, you meant that by his curiosity. Well, in my opinion, he’s set himself a thankless task.’

‘You used to like her,’ said Mrs. Ingestre.

‘She gives him more trouble than she’s worth,’ said her son. ‘If she’s going off her head into the bargain——’

‘Who said she was going off her head?’

This excited Mrs. Ingestre very much for a time, but unluckily it was again extinguished by a flat negative in Johnny’s next clear letter. Ursula was all there, he said, and was keeping his accounts for him. *He* was going off his head rapidly, owing to the perpetual interference and particular idiocy of his relations.

Next, the Ingestres adopted a theory that Ursula was jealous of little Miss Falkland. They rapidly added to it that she had the best of reasons for being so, since little Miss Falkland had visited at Routhwick, and (by the dowager) that it certainly served those Army people right.

With exquisite tact and courtesy, they again flung both theory and accusation at the head of the son and heir, in at least two brilliant and offensive letters.

Johnny did not reply at all,—proving no doubt that the shot had got home, or else that he had suddenly found another amusement. His next letter home, if it could be called a letter, was a list of remarks to his tailor, to be conveyed, and possibly translated, by one of his plain aunts.

As for his handsome father and grandmother, they were content for a time, and quiet. Everybody knew about jealousy, and the only surprising thing was that Johnny should be put out about such a trifle, incidental in all their lives. However, he seemed to be calming down.

Then old Mrs. Ingestre travelled out to take the sun at Biarritz in January, and met them. She wrote home at once to say Ursula was ill.

Ursula remained simply ill, for weeks, no details added : weeks during which, since his grandmother was present, Johnny, who seemed to be a little tired of Ursula, went off with Jem Hertford to Switzerland. During this period, the young Mrs. Ingestre and the old were *tête-à-tête*, and the head of the family in London rubbed his hands ; for his mother's letters to him had exactly the same degree of violent impatience that Johnny's had had at the previous date. She could make neither head nor tail of Ursula, and she was furious about it. She said her grandson's temper must be saintly, ever to have stood such a stupid little thing at all.

When she returned to London, the old lady said irritably that the girl must be in love,—she could see no other way of it : she was tired of the whole business. This was all very well, and even very conceivable in theory ; but they sought heaven and earth to find anybody at all plausible for Ursula to be in love with, in vain. There was nobody, such was the life she had led ; especially since the Auberon boy had broken off again, and was, by society's strong presumption, attached henceforth to the Falkland girl. That string to Ursula's rather feeble bow was broken. Besides, he had never seemed to attract her seriously, and all the conversations the dowager had ever managed to overhear had been extremely pious and impersonal. So finally the clever old lady, her real penetration at a loss, had to abandon the idea, and was mightily cross in consequence.

'And how's Johnny?' said Mr. Ingestre, when he happened to remember.

Johnny, said his grandmother sardonically, was mourning in retirement. Being pressed as to what that meant, she said that Johnny was a rogue, getting a woman old enough to be his mother to make a public fool of herself

about him, for the amusement of young Hertford, and a set of smart American people.

This allusion to Lady Ruabon and the Clewers diverted Mr. Ingestre for a time, but not for long. Johnny was as usual, was all it came to. Ursula was really more interesting ; for Mr. Ingestre could not but feel, if the case proved worth the attention to that extent, both of his mother, and of his son, it would be likely sooner or later to capture his own as well.

When Ursula came to Johnny and Jem in Switzerland, she was better : and even joined, with propriety, in some of their amusements. Not all, because she had not the strength. The air of the place they had chosen at random above Montreux seemed to suit her, and so, as long as Mr. Hertford's holiday lasted, they stayed on. Mr. Hertford should have been representing a section of his native town in the councils of his nation : but at the Christmas election, his native town's section had chucked him out, because a Labour candidate with convictions had turned up there. The new-comer was quite a good little fellow, according to Mr. Hertford, with lots of ambition and ingenuity, and a literary taste ; and though he did not address Mr. Hertford's constituents in quite such a competent fashion as himself, had just managed to outbid him in the political auction, and by splitting up the parties, had captured the seat. He was a thought too impetuous, though, Mr. Hertford confided to Johnny on the ice, and would probably overdo it : whereupon the community of Cranford West, tired of their bargain, would turn to Jem again with penitence and tears. Pending this desirable consummation, Mr. Hertford, M.P., could skate in Switzerland : and did so, to universal admiration.

When Hertford was recalled to London, Johnny and Ursula had a domestic interval ; and during that time, having little but her under his eyes, he began, as he would have said, to get there. He simply could not help it, his grandmother was right. Having no other human material,

he studied her. Up to the date of that extraordinary matter of the printed fabrication, he had never found her interesting ; since that date he had done so, now and then. He wondered what was really wrong with her, all the while she was acting under his eyes, as she thought, her normal admirable self. He was no believer in the well-known phrases about nervous depression—which meant nothing at all,—mental strain—of which Ursula was not capable,—or periods of reaction from the same—which for the same reason was out of court. He believed an *idée fixe* was hampering her, blocking even her ordinary little round of thought ; and smart as he was, he put it side by side in his mind, for some time, with that other inexplicable incident of the written lie, before he suddenly jumped at the connection between the two. When he did reach the truth, he could only be amazed at not having thought of it sooner,—this being Johnny's commonest way of surprising himself.

The fact that one evening when they were together alone they got upon the subject of Jill Jacoby and her tragic little story reminded Johnny of the fact that they had never talked it over in company. Ursula had never led that way of her own accord, and he was rather glad, since he preferred to keep Auberon's counsel. Yet it was, when you came to think of it, rather unnatural, since it was one of their few common interests in the past.

That evening Johnny led into the subject, for the reason that it had come up during the day ; quite casually during an afternoon expedition he had found himself discussing it. Some fellow who haunted the Geneva district in winter commonly, and knew most of the English hotels near the lake, had once heard a remarkable child recite at one of them. Concerning the child, Johnny's artistic curiosity had been awakened, and he had decided privately, on pressing the man, that it must have been Jill. He had even picked up a fragment of her earlier history. She had not been lame in those days, apparently ; she had hurt

her knee in an accident later. She had been a small, very pretty girl, an elf, with strange eyes and long hair and a weird beautiful voice. But it was the man described as attached to her that clinched the case, for it was certainly Jacoby. It agreed with all the facts about Jacoby Johnny had ever heard.

Since Ursula knew things about the Jacobys too, he communicated with her to get her agreement. He wanted to be agreed with, and having heard the evidence, Ursula did so quietly. It was probable, she said. Thence Johnny diverted to Jill's later history, and discussed the theme lazily a bit. Once launched on it, Ursula, who had avoided it hitherto, seemed rather inclined to cling. She pressed for an explanation of the girl's extraordinary idea in killing herself,—why should she, after all, when she had good friends and a comfortable post?

Johnny was tiresome, and would not answer; so Ursula proceeded to enumerate Jill's friends and resources. Herself, for instance: Celia Havant, who was a capable woman in her way: Miss Darcy, who, though a silly old thing, was kind enough: Quentin Auberon and his sister, both 'interested': and even John's actress-woman had talked about her, asked about her, if you came to that.

Johnny was still more tiresome, and made frivolous comments on the list instead of helping properly. Ursula grew fretful, and since Johnny really feared to worry her in certain moods, he dropped his levity.

'Oh Lord,' he said at last, being prodded by Ursula to account for the obvious, 'she was a woman and an artist, and they're the only logical people on this earth.'

'I thought you always said women were illogical,' said Ursula.

'Not artist-women,' said Johnny. 'They're the best kind.'

'But why should it be logical to kill herself? It's very wrong.'

'Oh yes,—so was the French Revolution,—beastly.' He

leant back and looked impatient. 'I wonder you don't see it. There she was, only fit for one profession, and crippled, knocked out. That might be enough alone. Well, put it she's in love with a man in addition, and can't get him——'

'Why can't she?'

'Well, put it she supposes she can't. Say she's a moral scruple——'

'Don't be absurd, John. Moral scruples,—a girl like that.'

'Course they're absurd. I said so lately.' He shifted his position again. 'Anyhow, Auberon would put any girl off,—sit on her,—stare her down. Confound him,' said Johnny fervently.

'Well, but naturally,' argued Ursula. 'It would be his duty, if he didn't care for her: and if,'—she added uncertainly,—'if he was all but engaged.'

Silence from Johnny.

'She might have heard of that,' said Ursula presently, working. Still silence. He did not help her. He was thinking, biting his hand.

'Miss Darcy might have mentioned it, you know. It was talked of. It had got about.'

He looked at her once, oddly. She was distinctly white, but continued bravely.

'Suppose she'd heard. Is that what you mean—she'd reason from? Logically?'

'I give you my word,' he said. 'I'd not thought of that. You're more logical than I am,—sharper anyhow. But there was enough without it,' he added, obviously with an effort.

Ursula moistened her lips, worked on, and said no more. It was awkward and unfinished, like all their intercommunication at this time,—but he saw light in the region where he had been groping, all the same. A shaft of light upon Ursula's inner working reached him. That was where she was, was it? Could it be? What a singular

trick of fate! Yet why not, after all?—it was quite a reasonable train of deduction on her side. Rather notably reasonable, for what he expected of her,—sharp, as he said. That paper, in which her printed lie appeared, was just the sort of paper old Darcy would read. Put it that she had read, noticed the paragraph, and purposely mentioned the fact of Auberon's engagement to the girl, hoping to settle once for all her unsettled roving little mind. Old Darcy had guessed she was in love with the man, after all, probably some time back,—she was cute enough to guess before anybody,—before Auberon himself. Well then, what would be her natural course in the state of things, feeling herself the girl's director? Exactly that, —to extinguish the hope, with the distractions to which it gave rise, if she had the opportunity.

It was queer, on Johnny's word. He nearly wrote off then and there to Miss Darcy to ask. He refrained anew, though, because in his real kindness of heart he had never disturbed his mother's old friend very deeply about the business, especially since the distress occasioned by his mother's death had diverted her naturally from the subject. The 'bearded one,' he thought, might so easily reproach herself for things she had or had not done by that girl: and first and last, she had been kinder to the poor kid than anyone, that was the fact.

So the only person Mr. John Ingestre did write to was his grandmother,—because he wanted to score. He told his grandmother, prematurely, that of course he knew all about Ursula by this time, and was surprised she should be still harping on the question. Ursula was all right. She only needed ragging a little,—the proper sort of ragging,—his sort; he just needed time to screw her up to concert pitch; and wipe the eye of the medical profession. After which various proceedings he would bring his wife back to London as bucked and bean-fed as any of his precious family could desire.

It was a particularly impertinent letter, full of the kind

of slang which, since she could not follow it, his grandmother most disliked, and calculated to make her wish that Johnny was half his age, so that he could be properly rewarded for it; but then Johnny was in exceptionally high spirits when he wrote it, having been successful on the ice that day.

However, having made these rash promises on paper, it was of course advisable to carry them out, which was considerably more difficult than writing them, and even exacted a real effort at times.

Johnny 'ragged' Ursula, for some weeks, in various experimental fashions, and she took it differently according to her health and mood, but generally speaking she seemed to like it rather. That was all to the good, but no more than Johnny expected. After all, when he really put his back into it, he could always get the attention of any woman, even hers. He was simply trying to get her attention, rather a difficult job just now, for she was vague. Having fixed it, centred it, so to speak, on himself, there was more chance of getting to work later, on other things.

But events in life never fall out according to one's planning,—Johnny had found this, that he could dispose almost anything human to his taste, sooner or later, but not the incidents of his career. They all seemed to tumble anyhow and upside-down.

Ursula took him badly by surprise when the crisis came,—she frightened him, gave him a real shock. For no winter sporting in healthful air, fine feeding nor vigorous flirting, could weed out that weak spot in Johnny, his woman's nerves.

She came behind him at midnight, in their private sitting-room at the hotel, at a moment when he was not reading, but reflecting in his chair. His hands were across his eyes. He had got rather deep into reflection, one of those haunting visions of another life,—his real life,—that obsessed him in solitude. He was just as bad as Ursula secretly, he admitted it at times like these. He was

obsessed, and hopelessly. Helena was in him, in the centre of him: he saw, felt her everywhere: pictured her fur-clad with him on the ice, pushed her lovely supple form up the mountain-paths, teased her delightfully under the green boughs on Christmas Eve, held her in his arms at midnight, as he had once—once only—his weird fate had dropped that marvellous moment from the skies.

And Ursula came into his dream, spoke behind him, and spoke, as Helena once had done, a single word,—one syllable,—his name.

'John!' she said.

But such a tone! Never, even on the stage, had he heard such a tone upon a woman's voice. Ursula's voice, too, which as an organ was weak and impoverished, held no sweet or impassioned range of expression.

He sat up and turned about in terror, ready for anything: and there she was, a very ghost with her loose fair hair, in her flowing faint-blue gown. Again, no stage could have supplied a figure to match her, for haunting fear and desperate remorse:—yet she was no actress, she cut a wretched figure always on the stage. She was just being herself for the minute, her own small-spirited uncertain self, whose presence he felt under her admirable outer aspect, day by day.

'What is it?' he said sharply. 'I say,—are you ill?'

She shook her head.

'Can't you sleep?' insisted Johnny. 'You'll be all right. Come and sit down a little,—get warm. . . . Lord,' he added, with a difficult laugh, 'you startled me.'

She came a little closer, at the laugh, and her lips moved.

'What's that?' said Johnny, suddenly alert. 'What did you say? I say, just say that again, would you mind?'

She said it again, being helpless, now close at his side. Murder.

'Oh, my prophetic soul!' thought Johnny. 'Now for it.' He held out his warm hand, and took her cold wrist. 'Ursula,' he said, in a pleasant tone, 'don't be a little fool.'

'John!'

'Well, you are. You're thinking of Auberon's so-called engagement,—which wasn't one,—ain't you? And its effects on that infant suicide?' She nodded faintly. 'Just so. Well then, you are one,—what I said. As if a female of that kind ever regards engagements and marriages!—they hardly know there are such things. You're getting mixed with your own lot, I may mention. Her sort's not like that.'

'How do you—know?' She looked awfully ill, certainly, as she gazed down at him.

'Never you mind,' said Johnny.

'No, but tell me. Don't—joke.'

He had had time to consider. 'I know from her journal, for one thing. There's written testimony for you. Unluckily,' said Johnny pensively, 'the journal's torn up, and burnt,—in my grate at Routhwick. Only you can take my word.'

'Yes,' she said mechanically, as he looked round at her.

'Jolly glad to hear it,—you didn't always. Never mind. Miss What's-her-name, Jill, put everything into that journal, unluckily. Personally, I never read such stuff. If she had ever seen the thing you're thinking of, the printed thing,—or heard of it even,—wouldn't she have flared for pages on the subject? 'Course she would. Nothing she'd have enjoyed more. Nothing she'd have liked better than having such a good excuse for tearing—er—Miss Falkland's eyes out, and his, and Darcy's—all of ours,—anybody's—'

'Then—she didn't.' Ursula frowned. She was following all she knew, he could see: doing her very best to follow.

'She didn't, that's all. Nowhere. Never alluded to it. Consequently,' said Johnny in his crispest tone and best elocution, 'she never heard. And if she'd heard, which she didn't, she'd have heard it contradicted, wouldn't she? Yes. And if you'd only, ever, remember things I say, you'd remember I said before she had reason enough to—er—'

end herself as it was. More than reason. About twice too much. I'd have done it for much less——'

'John!'

'If I'd been in her shoes,' said Johnny. 'I never met a girl I respected for a kind of straightforward thinking like that girl. I only wish you thought half as straight.'

'I might be—dead by now if I did,' said Ursula, smiling wanly. Still, it was a smile. She had drawn her hand from him, and was warming it with the other, nervously. Johnny gazed at her a minute fixedly,—he was still sitting up in his chair.

'Witty, that was,' he informed her. 'Something like a joke. You oughtn't to make jokes, it's not your line,—specially on serious subjects. . . . Now, do go to bed, and keep warm, and drop coming in to startle me. You startle me when you play the fool like that. I'm—er—used to your behaving yourself, especially towards midnight. See?'

'I'm—sorry,' said Ursula, trying to smile again. She did not manage it, and seemed incapable of saying more. She stood by him some seconds longer, and retired. As soon as she was gone, Johnny dropped back in his chair.

'Lord—save me for a liar!' he murmured, his dark eyes wide and innocent as he gazed at the lamp. He proceeded after a second's helplessness—'And a *bad* liar, what's more. I went back on myself once, at least. . . . Of course, it may not have been there, but I didn't read it to see if it wasn't. Dash this language,—do I mean that? I never read it to *ascertain* it wasn't. I never made sure. I might have, if I'd thought—but how the deuce was a fellow ever to guess——'

He stuck, mouth open, and remained gazing at the light for a time.

'Murder,' he said. 'Jolly nasty thing. Poor girl.'

After that he finally shut his mouth—on a cigarette. He found he needed it.

Ursula seized herself again, as the French say, the follow-

ing day,—she may have done so within the hour, we will not answer for her strict methods,—and forgot the impropriety of that midnight scene as rapidly as possible. The first result, Johnny noticed,—he was studying her passionately by now—was that she wanted to change quarters. She did not want to go on looking at that room where she had forgotten herself—or discovered herself—anyhow lowered herself before his eyes. After all, the best people may have nightmares at times, and she was not often like that. Indeed, looking back, she had never been so before in her recollection. Even in her first youth she had had to keep up her position as elder sister, with various critical young brothers just behind her. The thing was exceptional, and so might be overlooked.

Ursula overlooked it. Feeling better, after about a month in another nice place, which she chose,—and where Johnny picked up some people with whom he behaved a good deal too conspicuously for her perfect peace of mind,—she declared that she wanted English things, not the perpetual imitation,—and took him home.

She took him to the Hall. Having been ill, really given way, and so made herself interesting in the eyes of John's inexplicable family, she was treated with great consideration, and offered her choice in the matter of a spring residence. She was given to understand that her courteous father-in-law and her benevolent Grandmamma would accommodate themselves. This was really rather nice, and Ursula chose the Hall with her usual capable promptitude. The Hall had nothing to do with any of the scenes she most disliked remembering, in the first place. Also, of all the Ingestre houses, appertaining to John or his father, it was her favourite quarters, where she was happiest and felt most firm on her feet. She really enjoyed its atmosphere of aloof aristocracy, soft servitude, and immemorial calm. It is just for such people as Ursula that ancestral mansions and their traditions are made.

John enjoyed the English country too,—she thought of

him in making her selection, and consulted him even. She was not purely selfish in the matter : though she had little doubt he would sooner have gone back to the wilds of Routhwick and that dreary house. For his own stately antecedents he cared little, except, of course, for the beautiful things, pictures and so on, they had passed down to him, and for a few of their more disreputable personal lives. He seemed to care less than ever for aristocratic decorum now,—he was growing worse,—Ursula greatly feared he would prove eccentric at the end of all. However, Markham and the men loved him just as much as ever, and Ursula herself had sent away the housemaid with the hair to whom he had so vividly objected, the morning after the bridge broke down. She could venture easily now, being the Mrs. Ingestre,—the only one that mattered,—to do so.

It was a warm morning of March, and she was feeling fairly 'fit' and had recovered all her ancient authority and gracious calm, when she laid down the paper at breakfast, just as John came in. He picked it up one-handed in passing to his place, and as he did so, his head being turned from her, she said, to forestall any unnecessary exclamation—

'Violet Shovell's got a son.'

He stopped as though shot, his back still turned to her. Then he unfolded, and looked at the paper. Then he threw it on the table unread, and passed on to his own place.

'Good for her,' he said absently.

He sat down still thoughtful, his glance diverted. It was several seconds before his eyes took their natural direction, down the long table, to his wife. Then, immediately and abruptly, he got up again.

'Ursula,—for Heaven's sake——' he said.

In the very act of speaking to him, when she herself had been least prepared for it, Ursula had collapsed. Her head was on her arms, on the table, she was sobbing with

the abandonment of pure exhaustion,—she had long been worn out. This, one of the many possibilities she had set aside, refused to look at, had taken her unaware, just when she thought she had reached contentment, some sort of repose. That girl—with everything—it was too much!

‘Go away, don’t touch me,’ she sobbed furious, fighting with his hand. But of course he did touch. While she had been hedging, hiding from him, all that winter, he had been waiting for this, as unconsciously. It must out: he knew it must, eventually: she was human, after all. One day she would have to show him her true face.

He took her in his arms, now, by force: he could use force when necessary, and her strength was nothing to his. There was only one thing clear to him, she had somehow to be consoled. He owed her something,—a good deal, when you came to think. He could not stand and look on at her so suffering, really suffering, under the scourge. So he acted it, and acted superbly. He had never so put his heart into a part before. He felt triumphant, in advance. Grand, it was, to see all her defences crumble, vanish, and the truth sweep through. All he knew, Johnny encouraged it, sought to relieve her of that stagnant mass of shamming, of false superiority to mortal weakness, once for all. It was the one hope for her, he knew that. That was the doctoring she needed.

She was simply helpless before him. Love him?—of course she did. Who could help it, when he made himself like that? Her young John, the original, the long-lost, at last fulfilling all her poor little weakly dreams. She had been at his mercy, really, ever since that evening at Routhwick when he had reasoned with her in her wretched jealousy, and taken her hand. That long *tête-à-tête* she had chosen in the north had brought a most natural vengeance on herself. Each stroke she had aimed at him, in obscurity, not letting herself look at him in the light, had recoiled on herself in the end. This was the last shock, the irrecoverable: for she felt she loved.

She struggled for a period, all her pride struggled against his consolations, his cajolery. She told him she hated him, several times. But that was nothing,—Johnny had heard that sort of thing, in life, before. He was set on conquest, and he conquered. After all, he knew her pretty well: better than she knew him, by far,—by far. . . . He hemmed her in, made her listen to him, look at him, kiss him even. He did not ask to be forgiven, that was ridiculous, art itself could not stretch to that. But he asked, if she did not mind too awfully, to be liked: temporarily, of course: just for the moment, till she felt better, and could eat her breakfast. And Ursula, lost to commercial calculation, went beyond liking inevitably, and gave him about four times what he asked.

She bethought herself later, and regretted it, but it was done. A terrible thing, feminine weakness!—a thing to be escaped, at all costs. Only, being females, they cannot,—that is the beauty of it. Johnny had learnt that, if nothing else, in the course of his fruitful youth.

Later still, he went out into the green Spring woods, alone, to think about it: and to do penance, no doubt, before Helena's woodland shrine. She lived under the leaves for him, as Rosalind did in Arden, and he could find her there with no difficulty. But—really, life was very odd. . . . He wondered during that hour's walk, for the first time he wondered with all his soul, whether that logical girl, Miss Jacoby, had not found the simplest way.

However, he did not destroy himself; he came home to dinner, and wrote some letters afterwards. We will give the letters he wrote, because it occurs to us that our hero, a practised and persistent letter-writer, has not been treated fairly in this regard. It is our duty to do our best for all men, and especially heroes: so we do it, rather late.

He wrote first to Quentin, with whom he had been corresponding pretty regularly, during his winter abroad; though principally upon Quentin's own subjects, as to

which John, whose historical reading was wide and up-to-date, knew a good deal more than he commonly cared to show. Quentin made no secret of his opinion that Ingestre ought to go into Parliament, and had been putting his persuasions in every possible form,—fruitlessly. Not because Quentin was young,—on paper Johnny forgot his age, since he was clever, and treated him as a man and a brother, very willingly,—but because Mr. Ingestre did not agree as to the moral obligation. He was, in response to Quentin's well-urged appeal, hopelessly personal. He knew far too much, so it appeared, of the private history of prominent members in both houses,—for several generations back, what was worse,—to have the smallest respect remaining for his country's most cherished institutions. He appended to his injurious remarks a couple of finished word-portraits of his friends Mr. Hertford, M.P., and young Lord Dering, by way of illustration, without names: yet both so terribly true to type that Quentin, who was hampered in life by a sense of humour, was laid low for the time being by laughter, and could get no further with the argument. Johnny added as an afterthought that he hated London,—as if that had anything to do with it. Quentin hated London too.

The present letter ran as follows:

'MY DEAR AUBERON,

'Don't be an ass. It may be as you say, that you ought to read it, though Lord forbid I should ever take my duty to pieces so carefully: but first, you won't have it to read, because it's exactly as much my concern as yours, and I read all that was necessary: and second, you can't have it, because it's burnt. Can't get beyond that, can you? Very well, shut your mouth.

'Of course you can have me up in the courts of justice: only I warn you in advance that the document that bequeathed the thing to you is burnt as well, and that Ursula will say anything in a witness-box that I tell her.

I may have to tell her to say the opposite, but anyway she will say what I want. And as soon as I have a minute, I'm going to jolly well give it her for giving my secrets away, because of course it was she. Women ought to be muzzled, they shall be next time my side comes in. What's more, I strongly suspect in whose ear she breathed it. You can tell young Falkland I thought he had more discretion. He's a rough-haired young rotter, tell him. But I suppose you got it out of him, put the screw on, didn't you? A nice way that to treat your friends.

'I think the chances are you're inclined to vex yourself about the whole thing too much. I also suspect you have been refraining from vexing me. Jolly kind of you, but the fact is, it's not worth it. The case is not worth it, meaning the girl. If it had not been you, it would have been another,—me probably,—that I swear. The only difference would have been, I should have told her to go to the devil, and she'd have gone and done it just the same. It's a case of temperament, do you grasp, and that's "disease," if you like to call it so. But your dashed education will never have any effect upon it, nor your nice religion either. The latter, so far as I've noticed, makes it rather worse.

'I send you, in this connection, Fan Mitchell's letter, which may throw some light: for if ever a woman knew what temperament and what trials mean, she is that one. And let me have it back, would you mind,—but I needn't ask you. It's a beautiful letter, English or no, and she's a beautiful soul. You see she would have found the child a chance in spite of Mitchell, and Mitchell's no joke. If only the stupid kid would have waited another month or two,—but they never wait.

'Close the page, do you mind? It's better for all parties. When I last saw old Darcy she was planning never to move again, but to die where she was. She told me so. What's more I fear she'll do it, if not distracted, because my mother's death, coming on top of the other

thing, broke her badly. Is it too much to ask Miss Falkland, do you think, to go and see her? She wouldn't be afraid? I'd send my young cousin, only unluckily she's rather taken up for the moment, so I'm driven to apply elsewhere. Could you get in a request, some time or other, —don't mind about mentioning me.'

Johnny was just going to sign it, when he stopped, leant back a moment 'drooping his eyes,' and added above the signature—

'And I say, would you mind asking Miss Falkland to marry you? I understand it's expected of you, and has been for some time.'

'That'll do him,' he thought, as he sealed the letter up. 'And Heaven help her,' he privately added.

To Miss Darcy he wrote, that the miniature of the Maréchale had been examined by the experts, just to see that it was all right, after its last remarkable escapade, and re-valued by the way. And that the price put on the pink lady's little head was really so preposterous, that he could not reconcile it with his conscience to keep her at the Hall. So would Miss Darcy mind resuming her guardianship, at least for a time, until he had had a safe made? And would she mind keeping the transaction dark from Johnny's father, until he had had a safe made for himself?

To Violet he wrote—

'MY DEAREST GIRL,

'That's as it should be, never mind the rest.

'I wish I could see you in your happiness, but I can't, you must excuse. My present business is to see Ursula through. Nor have I pressed her for a message, nor will I invent one, when the heavens are showering real blessings

on you. My own you will take as intended, straight from the middle of these green woods. You can simply have no notion what they are this year. Or at least perhaps you can, Mrs. Shovell, with the spring in your arms.

'Markham was moved, when I told him. I had to entreat him to keep calm. His eyes rolled for a time, and he seemed big with prophecy. But nothing came of it except to request his respectful remembrances, which I hereby send. It may, of course, have a dark significance. Markham may, at heart, be a traitor to the younger line. But for all these years I have spent in cultivating him, I shouldn't like to think it, darling, so I won't. I left feeling polished by the mere contact, as usual. I often think, if Markham had been my father—never mind.

'My Life is finished,—don't be alarmed: I mean that of my great-grandfather's great-uncle. My own is going on a bit longer, I expect, at least I never felt so inextinguishably alive as I do this March. I want you to read, mark, and digest the Life, however, not only because it's jolly good stuff, and a beastly well-contrived defence of a blackguard, nor because you may have some remarks to offer on some parts of it, to which I shall not attend,—but because it may open your eyes to some things in this blackguard by the way. That's why I had to defend him, probably. His love-letters are simply ripping, just like mine, and it's a close thing which are the worse spelt, the French or the English. One of my dishonesties is to transcribe them all correctly—I mean incorrectly—I corrected them. It's a pity, though. Why haven't we the spunk nowadays to spell as we choose?

'If I grow to be old, Violet, as he did, and can avoid drink, as he did not, I should like to write, for the sake of such friends as are left me, the history of this last year. I suppose the wise man, the sapient, never surprises himself. Which is as much as to say, heaven has no surprises left for him. Poor brute! All the same, if I had

known there was, in earth or heaven, such glory lurking, I should not have ragged the heavens in my youth so blatantly. As it is, I'm a bit shy of them, the scene-shifters aloft. For who knows, next time they open, what they mayn't have to show?

'I think H. will come to you, and soon. I see her when I see your face, with your child. And hers anticipating, shadowing,—but don't let her know too soon. I feared for a moment, you know, I had shaken her out of her natural growth, like forcing a wild-flower, a horrid thing. But keep her back—you can, my little wise woman—keep her out of doors, since that's her place. Let it come slow, so it will last long, and remain good for her, entirely good, to the uttermost end. I should blame myself otherwise. I do, as it is. It is a situation I can't manage, since I could not foresee it,—beats me,—lays me out. The only one in the world.

'Love to Margery. Thine, same as ever,

'JOHN.'



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